

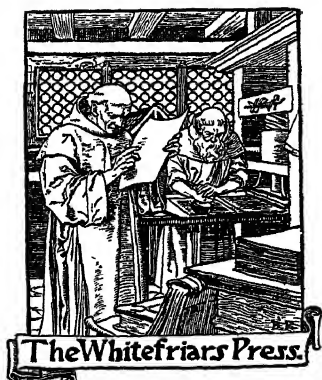
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Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour



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MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR

Illustrated
With 13 Hand-Coloured Engravings
and many Woodcuts by
JOHN LEECH

VOLUME II

London
Bradbury, Agnew, & Co. Ltd., Bouverie Street

Mrs SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR

BY THE

Author of
"Handley-Crofts"
"Jorrocks's Jaunts"
Ec., Ec., Ec.



with

illustrations by
John Leech.

BRADBURY, AGNEW, & CO. LD.,
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CHAPTER XXXVI.

LORD SCAMPERDALE AT JAWLEYFORD COURT.



ALTHOUGH we have hitherto depicted Lord Scamperdale either in his great uncouth hunting-clothes, or in the flare-up red and yellow Stunner tartan, it must not be supposed that he had not fine clothes when he chose to wear them, only he wanted to save them, as he said, to be married in. That he had fine ones, indeed, was evident from the rig-out he lent Jack, when that worthy went to Jawleyford Court, and, in addition to those which were of the evening order, he had an uncommonly smart Stultz frock-coat, with a velvet collar, facings, and cuffs, and a silk lining. Though so rough and ready among the men, he was quite the dandy among the ladies, and was as anxious about his appearance as a girl of sixteen. He got himself clipped and trimmed, and shaved with the greatest care, curving his whiskers high on to the cheek-bones, leaving a great breadth of bare fallow below.

Baggs the butler was despatched betimes to Jawleyford Court with the dog-cart freighted with clothes, driven by a groom to attend to the horses, while his lordship mounted his galloping grey hack towards noon, and dashed through the country like a comet. The people, who were only accustomed to see him in his short, country-cut hunting-coats, baggy breeches, and

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shapeless boots, could hardly recognise the frock-coated, fancy-vested, military-trouserred swell, as Lord Scamperdale. Even Titus Grabington, the superintendent of police, declared that he wouldn't have known him but for his hat and specs. The latter, we need hardly say, were the silver ones—the pair that he would not let Jack have when he went to Jawleyford Court. So his lordship went capering and careering along; avoiding, of course, all the turnpike-gates, of which he had a mortal aversion.

Jawleyford Court was in full dress to receive him—everything was full fig. Spigot appeared in buckled shorts and black silk stockings; while vases of evergreens and winter flowers mounted sentry on passage tables and landing-places. Everything bespoke the elegant presence of the fair.

To the credit of Dame Fortune let us record that everything went smoothly and well. Even the kitchen fire behaved as it ought. Neither did Lord Scamperdale arrive before he was wanted, a very common custom with people unused to public visiting. He cast up just when he was wanted. His ring of the door-bell acted like the little tinkling-bell at a theatre, sending all parties to their places, for the curtain to rise.

Spigot and his two footmen answered the summons, while his lordship's groom rushed out of a side-door, with his mouth full of cold meat, to take his hack.

Having given his flat hat to Spigot, his whip-stick to one footman, and his gloves to the other, he proceeded to the family *tableau* in the drawing-room.

Though his lordship lived so much by himself he was neither *gauche* nor stupid when he went into society. Unlike Mr. Spraggon, he had a tremendous determination of words to the mouth, and went best pace with his tongue instead of coughing and hemming, and stammering and stuttering, wishing himself "well out of it," as the saying is. His seclusion only seemed to sharpen his faculties and make him enjoy society more. He gushed forth like a pent-up fountain. He was not a bit afraid of the ladies—rather the contrary; indeed, he would make love to them all—all that were good-looking, at least, for



LORD SCAMPERDALE AS HE APPEARED IN HIS "SWELL" CLOTHES.

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he always candidly said that he "wouldn't have anything to do with the ugly 'uns." If anything, he was rather too vehement, and talked to the ladies in such an earnest, interested sort of way, as made even bystanders think there was "something in it," whereas, in point of fact, it was mere manner.

He began as soon as ever he got to Jawleyford Court,—at least as soon as he had paid his respects all round and got himself partially thawed at the fire; for the cold had struck through his person, his fine clothes being a poor substitute for his thick double-milled red coat, blankety waistcoat, and Jersey shirt.

There are some good-natured, well-meaning people in this world who think that fox-hunters can talk of nothing but hunting, and who put themselves to very serious inconvenience in endeavouring to get up a little conversation for them. We knew a bulky old boy of this sort, who invariably, after the cloth was drawn, and he had given each leg a kick-out to see if they were on, commenced with "Well, I suppose Mr. Harkington has a fine set of dogs this season?" "A fine set of dogs this season!" What an observation! How on earth could any one hope to drive a conversation on the subject with such a commencement?

Some ladies are equally obliging in this respect. They can stoop to almost any subject that they think will procure them husbands. Music!—if a man is fond of music, they will sing themselves into his good graces in no time. Painting!—oh, they adore painting—though in general they don't profess to be great hands at it themselves. Balls, boating, archery, racing,—all these they can take a lively interest in; or, if occasion requires, can go on the serious tack and hunt a parson with penny subscriptions for a clothing-club or soup-kitchen.

Fox-hunting!—we do not know that fox-hunting is so safe a speculation for young ladies as any of the foregoing. There are many *pros* and *cons* in the matter of the chase. A man may think—especially in these hard times, with "wheat below forty," as Mr. Springwheat would say—that it will be as much as he can do to mount himself. Again, he may not think a lady looks any better for running down with perspiration,

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and being daubed with mud. Above all, if he belongs to the worshipful company of Craners, he may not like for his wife to be seen beating him across country.

Still, there are many ways that young ladies may insinuate themselves into the good graces of sportsmen without following them into the hunting-field. Talking about their horses, above all admiring them,—taking an interest in their sport,—seeing that they have nice papers of sandwiches to take out with them,—or recommending them to be bled when they come home with dirty faces after falls.

Miss Amelia Jawleyford, who was most elegantly attired in a sea-green silk dress with large imitation pearl buttons, claiming the usual privilege of seniority of birth, very soon led the charge against Lord Scamperdale.

“Oh, what a lovely horse that is you were riding,” observed she, as his lordship kept stooping with both his little red fists close into the bars of the grate.

“Isn't it!” exclaimed he, rubbing his hands heartily together. “Isn't it!” repeated he; adding, “That's what I call a clipper.”

“Why do you call it so?” asked she.

“Oh, I don't mean that clipper is its name,” replied he; “indeed, we call her Cherry Bounce in the stable,—but she's what they call a clipper—a good 'un to go, you know,” continued he, staring at the fair speaker through his great, formidable spectacles.

We believe there is nothing frightens a woman so much as staring at her through spectacles. A barrister in barnacles is a far more formidable cross-examiner than one without. But, to his lordship's hack.

“Will he eat bread out of your hand?” asked Amelia; adding, “I *should* so like a horse that would eat bread out of my hand.”

“Oh, yes; or cheese either,” replied his lordship, who was a bit of a wag, and as likely to try a horse with one as the other.

“Oh, how delightful! what a charming horse!” exclaimed Amelia, turning her fine eyes up to the ceiling.

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"Are you fond of horses?" asked his lordship, smacking one hand against the other, making a noise like the report of a pistol.

"Oh, so fond!" exclaimed Amelia, with a start; for she hadn't got through her favourite, and, as she thought, most attractive attitude.

"Well, now, that's *nice*," said his lordship, giving his other hand a similar bang; adding, "I *like* a woman that's fond of horses."

"Then 'Melia and you'll 'gree nicely," observed Mrs. Jawleyford, who was always ready to give a helping hand to her own daughters, at least.

"I don't doubt it!" replied his lordship, with emphasis, and a third bang of his hand, louder if possible than before. "And do *you* like horses?" asked his lordship, darting sharply round on Emily, who had been yielding, or rather submitting, to the precedence of her sister.

"Oh, yes; and hounds, too!" replied she, eagerly.

"And hounds, too!" exclaimed his lordship, with a start, and another hearty bang of the fist; adding, "Well, now, I *like* a woman that likes hounds."

Amelia frowned at the unhandsome march her sister had stolen upon her. Just then in came Jawleyford, much to the annoyance of all parties. A host should never show before the dressing-bell rings.

When that glad sound was at length heard, the ladies, as usual, immediately withdrew; and of course the first thing Amelia did when she got to her room was to run to the glass to see how she had been looking; when, grievous to relate, she found an angry hot spot in the act of breaking out on her nose.

What a distressing situation for a young lady, especially one with a spectacléd suitor. "Oh, dear!" she thought, as she eyed it in the glass, "it will look like Vesuvius itself through his formidable inquisitors." Worst of all, it was on the side she would have next him at dinner, should he choose to sit with his back to the fire. However, there was no help for it, and the maid kindly assuring her, as she worked away at her



LORD SCAMPERDALE AND MISS AMELIA.

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hair, that it "would never be seen," she ceased to watch it, and turned her attention to her toilette. The fine, new broad-lace flounced, light blue satin dress—a dress so much like a ball-dress as to be only appreciable as a dinner one by female eyes—was again in requisition; while her fine arms were encircled with chains and armlets of various brilliance and devices. Thus attired, with a parting inspection of the spot, she swept down stairs, with as smart a bouquet as the season would afford. As luck would have it, she encountered his lordship himself wandering about the passage in search of the drawing-room, of whose door he had not made a sufficient observation on leaving. He, too, was uncommonly smart, with the identical dress-coat Mr. Spraggon wore, a white waistcoat with turquoise buttons, a lace-frilled shirt, and a most extensive once-round Joinville. He had been eminently successful in accomplishing a tie that would almost rival the sticks farmers put upon truant geese to prevent their getting through gaps or under gates.

Well, Miss Amelia having come to his lordship's assistance, and eased him of his candle, now showed him into the drawing-room; and his hands being disengaged, like a true Englishman, he must be doing, and accordingly he commenced an attack on her bouquet.

"That's a fine nosegay!" exclaimed he, staring and running his snub nose into the midst of it.

"Let me give you a piece," replied Amelia, proceeding to detach some of the best.

"Do," replied his lordship, banging one hand against the other; adding "I'll wear it next my heart of hearts."

In sidled Miss Emily just as his lordship was adjusting it in his button-hole, and the inconstant man immediately chopped over to her.

"Well, now, that *is* a beautiful nosegay!" exclaimed he, turning upon her in precisely the same way, with a bang of the hand and a dive of his nose into Emily's.

She did not offer him any, and his lordship continued his attention to her until Mrs. Jawleyford entered.

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Dinner was presently announced ; but his lordship, instead of choosing to sit with his back to the fire, took the single chair opposite, which gave him a commanding view of the young ladies. He did not, however, take any advantage of his position during the repast, neither did he talk much, his maxim being to let his meat stop his mouth. The preponderance of his observations, perhaps, were addressed to Amelia, though a watchful observer might have seen that the spectacles were oftener turned upon Emily. Up to the withdrawal of the cloth, however, there was no perceptible advantage on either side.

As his lordship settled to the sweets, at which he was a great hand at dessert, Amelia essayed to try her influence with the popular subject of a ball.

"I wish the members of your hunt would give us a ball, my lord," observed she.

"Ah, hay, hum, ball," replied he, ladling up the syrup of some preserved peaches that he had been eating ; "ball, ball, ball. No place to give it—no place to give it," repeated he.

"Oh, give it in the town-hall, or the long room at the Angel," replied she.

"Town-hall—long room at the Angel—Angel at the long room of the town-hall—oh, certainly, certainly, certainly," muttered he, scraping away at the contents of his plate.

"Then that's a bargain, mind," observed Amelia, significantly.

"Bargain, bargain, bargain—certainly," replied he ; "and I'll lead off with you, or you'll lead off with me—whichever way it is—meanwhile, I'll trouble you for a piece of that gingerbread."

Having supplied him with a most liberal slice, she resumed the subject of the ball.

"Then we'll fix it so," observed she.

"Oh, fix it so, certainly—certainly fix it so," replied his lordship, filling his mouth full of gingerbread.

"Suppose we have it on the day of the races?" continued Amelia.

"Couldn't be better," replied his lordship ; "couldn't be better," repeated he, eyeing her intently through his formidable specs.

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His lordship was quite in the assenting humour, and would have agreed to anything—anything short of lending one a five-pound note.

Amelia was charmed with her success. Despite the spot on her nose, she felt she was winning.

His lordship sat like a target, shot at by all, but making the most of his time, both in the way of eating and staring between questions.

At length the ladies withdrew, and his lordship having waddled to the door to assist their egress, now availed himself of Jawleyford's invitation to occupy an arm-chair during the enjoyment of his "Wintle."

Whether it was the excellence of the beverage, or that his lordship was unaccustomed to wine-drinking, or that Jawleyford's conversation was unusually agreeable, we know not, but the summons to tea and coffee was disregarded, and when at length they did make their appearance, his lordship was what the ladies call rather elevated, and talked thicker than there was any occasion for. He was very voluble at first—told all how Sponge had knocked him about, how he detested him, and wouldn't allow him to come to the hunt ball, &c.; but he gradually died out, and at last fell asleep beside Mrs. Jawleyford on the sofa, with his little legs crossed and a half-emptied coffee-cup in his hand, which Mr. Jawleyford and she kept anxiously watching, expecting the contents to be over the fine satin furniture every moment.

In this pleasant position they remained till he awoke himself with a hearty snore, and turned the coffee over on to the carpet. Fortunately there was little damage done, and, it being nearly twelve o'clock, his lordship waddled off to bed.

Amelia, when she came to think matters over in the retirement of her own room, was well satisfied with the progress she had made. She thought she only wanted opportunity to capture him. Though she was most anxious for a good night in order that she might appear to advantage in the morning, sleep forsook her eyelids, and she lay awake long thinking what she would do when she was my lady—how she would warm



AN EARLY BREAKFAST.

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Woodmansterne, and what a dashing equipage she would keep. At length she dropped off, just as she thought she was getting into her well-appointed chariot, showing a becoming portion of her elegantly turned ankles.

In the morning she attired herself in her new light satin blue robe, corsage Albanaise, with a sort of three-quarter sleeves, and muslin under ones—something, we believe, out of the last book of fashion. She also had her hair uncommonly well arranged, and sported a pair of clean primrose-coloured gloves. “Now for victory,” said she, as she took a parting glance at herself in general, and the hot spot in particular.

Judge of her disgust on meeting her mamma on the staircase at learning that his lordship had got up at six o'clock, and had gone to meet his hounds on the other side of the county. That Baggs had boiled his oatmeal porridge in his bedroom, and his lordship had eaten it as he was dressing.

It may be asked, what was the maid about not to tell her.

The fact is, that ladies'-maids are only numb hands in all that relates to hunting, and though Juliana knew that his lordship was up, she thought he had gone to have his hunt before breakfast, just as the young gentlemen in the last place she lived in used to go and have a bathe.

Baggs, we may add, was a married man, and Juliana and he had not had much conversation.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

MR BRAGG'S KENNEL MANAGEMENT.



THE reader will now have the kindness to consider that Mr. Puffington has undergone his swell huntsman, Dick Bragg, for three whole years, during which time it was difficult to say whether his winter's service or his summer's impudence was most oppressive. Either way, Mr. Puffington had had enough both of him and the honours of hound-keeping. Mr. Bragg was not a judicious tyrant. He lorded it too much over Mr. Puffington; was too fond of showing himself off, and exposing his master's ignorance before the servants and field. A stranger would have thought that Mr. Bragg, and not "Mr. Puff," as Bragg called him, kept the hounds. Mr. Puffington took it pretty quietly at first, Bragg inundating him with what they did at the Duke of Downeybird's, Lord Reynard's, and the other great places in which he had lived, till he almost made Puff believe that such treatment was a necessary consequence of hound-keeping. Moreover, the cost was heavy, and the promised subscriptions were almost wholly imaginary; even if they had been paid, they would not have covered a quarter of the expense Mr. Bragg run him to; and, worst of all, there was an increasing instead of a diminishing expenditure. Trust a servant for keeping things up to the mark.

All things, however, have an end, and Mr. Bragg began to get to the end of Mr. Puff's patience. As Puff got older he got fonder of his five-pound notes, and began to scrutinise bills and

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

ask questions; to be, as Mr. Bragg said, "very little of the gentleman;" Bragg, however, being quite one of your "make-hay-while-the-sun-shines" sort, and knowing too well the style of man to calculate on a lengthened duration of office, just put on the steam of extravagance, and seemed inclined to try how much he could spend for his master. His bills for draft hounds were enormous; he was continually chopping and changing his horses, often almost without consulting his master; he had a perfect museum of saddles and bridles, in which every invention and variety of bit was exhibited; and he had paid as much as twenty pounds to different "valets" and grooms for invaluable recipes for cleaning leather breeches and gloves. Altogether, Bragg overdid the thing; and when Mr. Puffington, in the solitude of a winter's day, took pen, ink, and paper, and drew out a "balance sheet," he found that on the average of six brace of foxes to the season, they had cost him about three hundred pound a-head killing. It was true that Bragg always returned five or six-and-twenty brace; but that was as between Bragg and the public, as between Bragg and his master the smaller figure was the amount.

Mr. Puffington had had enough of it, and he now thought if he could get Mr. Sponge (who he still believed to be a sporting author on his travels) to immortalise him, he might retire into privacy, and talk of "when *I* kept hounds," "when *I* hunted the country," "when *I* was master of hounds *I* did this, and *I* did that," and fuss, and be important, as we often see X-masters of hounds when they go out with other packs. It was this erroneous impression with regard to Mr. Sponge that took our friend to the meet of Lord Scamperdale's hounds at Scrambleford Green, when he gave Mr. Sponge a general invitation to visit him before he left the country, an invitation that was as acceptable to Mr. Sponge on his expulsion from Jawleyford Court, as it was agreeable to Mr. Puffington — by opening a *route* by which he might escape from the penalty of hound-keeping, and the persecution of his huntsman.

The reader will therefore now have the kindness to consider

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

Mr. Puffington in receipt of Mr. Sponge's note, volunteering a visit.

With gay and cheerful steps our friend hurried off to the kennel, to communicate the intelligence to Mr. Bragg of an intended honour that he inwardly hoped would have the effect of extinguishing that great sporting luminary.

Arriving at the kennel, he learned from the old feeder, Jack Horsehide, who, as usual, was sluicing the flags with water, though the weather was wet, that Mr. Bragg was in the house (a house that had been the steward's in the days of the former owner of Hanby House). Thither Mr. Puffington proceeded; and the front door being open he entered, and made for the little parlour on the right. Opening the door without knocking, what should he find but the swell huntsman, Mr. Bragg, full fig, in his cap, best scarlet and leathers, astride a saddle-stand, sitting for his portrait!

"O, *dim it!*" exclaimed Bragg, clasping the front of the stand as if it was a horse, and throwing himself off, an operation that had the effect of bringing the new saddle on which he was seated bang on the floor. "O, *sc-e-e-use* me, sir," seeing it was his master, "I thought it was my servant; this, sir," continued he, blushing and looking as foolish as men do when caught getting their hair curled or sitting for their portraits,— "this, sir, is my friend, Mr. Ruddle, the painter, sir—yes, sir—very talented young man, sir—asked me to sit for my portrait, sir—is going to publish a series of portraits of all the best huntsmen in England, sir."

"And masters of hounds," interposed Mr. Ruddle, casting a sheep's eye at Mr. Puffington.

"And masters of hounds, sir," repeated Mr. Bragg; "yes, sir, and masters of hounds, sir;" Mr. Bragg being still somewhat flurried at the unexpected intrusion.

"Ah, well," interrupted Mr. Puffington, who was still eager about his mission, "we'll talk about that after. At present I'm come to tell you," continued he, holding up Mr. Sponge's note, "that we must brush up a little—going to have a visit of inspection from the great Mr. Sponge."

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

"Indeed, sir!" replied Mr. Bragg, with the slightest possible touch of his cap, which he still kept on. "Mr. Sponge, sir!—indeed, sir—Mr. Sponge, sir—pray who may *he* be, sir?"

"Oh—why—hay—hum—haw—he's Mr. Sponge, you know—been hunting with Lord Scamperdale, you know—great sportsman, in fact—great authority, you know."

"Indeed—great authority is he—indeed—oh—yes—thinks so p'raps—*sc-e-e-use* me, sir, but des-say, sir, I've forgot more, sir, than Mr. Sponge ever knew, sir."

"Well, but you musn't tell him so," observed Mr. Puffington, fearful that Bragg might spoil sport.

"Oh, tell him—*no*," sneered Bragg, with a jerk of the head; "tell him—no; I'm not exactly such a donkey as that; on the contrary, I'll make things pleasant, sir—sugar his milk for him, sir, in short, sir."

"Sugar his milk!" exclaimed Mr. Puffington, who was only a matter-of-fact man; "sugar his milk! I dare say he takes tea."

"Well, then, sugar his tea," replied Bragg, with a smile; adding, "Can 'commodeate myself, sir, to circumstances, sir," at the same time taking off his cap and setting a chair for his master.

"Thank you, but I'm not going to stay," replied Mr. Puffington; "I only came up to let you know who you had to expect, so that you might prepare, you know—have all on the square, you know—best horses—best hounds—best appearance in general, you know."

"That I'll attend to," replied Mr. Bragg, with a toss of the head,—"*that I'll* attend to," repeated he, with an emphasis on the *I'll*, as much as to say, "don't you meddle with what doesn't concern you."

Mr. Puffington would fain have rebuked him for his impertinence, as indeed he often would fain have rebuked him; but Mr. Bragg had so overpowered him with science, and impressed him with the necessity of keeping him—albeit Mr. Puffington was sensible that he killed very few foxes—that, having put up with him so long, he thought it would never do to risk a



Mr. Briggs's Egg-shaped Portrait

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quarrel, which might lose him the chance of getting rid of him and hounds altogether; therefore, Mr. Puffington, instead of saying, "You conceited humbug, get out of this," or indulging in any observations that might lead to controversy, said, with a satisfied, confidential nod of the head—

"I'm sure you will—I'm sure you will," and took his departure, leaving Mr. Bragg to remount the saddle-stand, and take the remainder of his sitting.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MR. PUFFINGTON'S DOMESTIC ARRANGEMENTS



PERHAPS it was fortunate that Mr. Bragg did take the kennel management upon himself, or there is no saying but what with that and the house department, coupled with the usual fussiness of a bachelor, the Sponge visit might have proved too much for our master. The notice of the intended visit was short; and there were invitations to send out, and answers to get, bed-rooms to prepare, and culinary arrangements to make—arrangements that people in town, with all their tradespeople at their elbows, can have no idea of the difficulty of effecting in the country. Mr. Puffington was fully employed.

In addition to the parties mentioned as asked in his note to Lord Scamperdale, viz., Washball, Charley Slapp, and Lump-leg, were Parson Blossomnose, and Mr. Fossick of the Flat Hat Hunt, who declined—Mr. Crane, of Crane Hall, and Captain Guano, late of that noble corps the Spotted Horse Marines, and others who accepted. Mr. Spraggon was a sort of volunteer, at all events an undesired guest, unless his lordship accompanied him. It so happened that the least wanted guest was the first to arrive on the all-important day.

Lord Scamperdale, knowing our friend Jack was not over affluent, had no idea of spoiling him by too much luxury, and as the railway would serve a certain distance in the line of Hanby House, he despatched Jack to the Over-shoes-over-boots station with the dog-cart, and told him he would be sure to find a 'bus, or to get some sort of conveyance at the



JACK PROTESTS AGAINST ALL RAILWAYS.

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Squandercash station to take him up to Puffington's; at all events, his lordship added to himself, "If he doesn't, it'll do him no harm to walk, and he can easily get a boy to carry his bag."

The latter was the case; for though the station-master assured Jack, on his arrival at Squandercash, that there was a 'bus, or a mail gig, or a something to every other train, there was nothing in connexion with the one that brought him, nor would he undertake to leave his carpet bag at Hanby House before breakfast time the next morning.

Jack was highly enraged, and proceeded to squint his eyes inside out, and abuse all railways, and chairmen, and directors, and secretaries, and clerks, and porters, vowing that railways were the greatest nuisances under the sun—that they were a perfect impediment instead of a facility to travelling—and declared that formerly a gentleman had nothing to do but order his four horses, and have them turned out at every stage as he came up, instead of being stopped in the *ridicklous* manner he then was; and he strutted and stamped about the station as if he would put a stop to the whole line.

His vehemence and big talk operated favourably on the cockney station-master, who, thinking he must be a duke, or some great man, began to consider how to get him forwarded. It being only a thinly-populated district—though there was a station equal to any mercantile emergency, indeed to the requirements of the whole county—he ran the resources of the immediate neighbourhood through his mind, and at length was obliged to admit—humbly and respectfully—that he really was afraid Martha Muggins's donkey was the only available article.

Jack fumed and bounced at the very mention of such a thing, vowing that it was a downright insult to propose it; and he was so bumptious that the station-master, who had nothing to gain by the transaction, sought the privacy of the electric telegraph office, and left him to vent the balance of his wrath upon the porters.

Of course they could do nothing more than the king of their little colony had suggested; and finding there was no help for

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it, Mr. Spraggon at last submitted to the humiliation, and set off to follow young Muggins with his bag on the donkey, in his best top-boots, worn under his trousers—an unpleasant operation to any one, but especially to a man like Jack, who preferred wearing his tops out against the flaps of his friends' saddles, rather than his soles by walking upon them. However, necessity said yes; and cocking his flat hat jauntily on his head, he stuck a cheroot in his mouth, and went smoking and swaggering on, looking—or rather squinting—bumptiously at everybody he met, as much as to say, “Don't suppose I'm walking from necessity! I've plenty of tin.”

The third cheroot brought Jack and his suite within sight of Hanby House.

Mr. Puffington had about got through all the fuss of his preparations, arranged the billets of the guests, and of those scarcely less important personages—their servants, allotted the stables, and rehearsed the wines, when a chance glance through the gaily-furnished drawing-room window discovered Jack trudging up the trimly-kept avenue.

“Here's that *nasty* Spraggon,” exclaimed he, eyeing Jack dragging his legs along; adding, “I'll be bound to say he'll never think of wiping his filthy feet if I don't go to meet him.”

So saying, Puffington rushed to the entrance, and crowning himself with a white wide-awake, advanced cheerily to do so.

Jack, who was more used to “cold shoulder” than cordial receptions, squinted and stared with surprise at the unwonted warmth, so different to their last interview, when Jack was fresh out of his clay-hole in the Brick Fields; but not being easily put out of his way, he just took Puff as Puff took him. They talked of Scamperdale, and they talked of Frostyface, and the number of foxes he had killed, the price of corn, and the difference its price made in the keep of hounds and horses. Altogether they were very “thick.”

“And how's our friend Sponge?” asked Puffington, as the conversation at length began to flag.

“Oh, he's nicely,” replied Jack; adding, “hasn't he come yet?”

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"Not that I've seen," answered Puffington; adding, "I thought, perhaps, you might come together."

"No," grunted Jack; "he comes from Jawleyford's, you know; I'm from Woodmansterne."

"We'll go and see if he's come," observed Puffington, opening a door in the garden-wall, into which he had manœuvred Jack, communicating with the court-yard of the stable.

"Here are his horses," observed Puffington, as Mr. Leather rode through the great gates on the opposite side, with the renowned hunters in full marching order.

"Monstrous fine animals they are," said Jack, squinting intently at them.

"They are that," replied Puffington.

"Mr. Sponge seems a very pleasant, gentlemanly man," observed Mr. Puffington.

"Oh, he is," replied Jack.

"Can you tell me—can you inform me—that's to say, can you give me any idea," hesitated Puffington, "what is the usual practice—the usual course—the usual understanding as to the treatment of those sort of gentlemen?"

"Oh, the best of everything's good enough for them," replied Jack; adding, "just as it is with me."

"Ah, I don't mean in the way of eating and drinking, but in the way of encouragement—in the way of a present, you know?" adding—"What did my lord do?" seeing Jack was slow at comprehension.

"Oh, my lord bad-worded him well," replied Jack; adding, "he didn't get much encouragement from him."

"Ah, that's the worst of my lord," observed Puffington; "he's rather coarse—rather too indifferent to public opinion. In a case of this sort, you know, that doesn't happen every day, or, perhaps, more than once in a man's life, it's just as well to be favourably spoken of as not, you know;" adding, as he looked intently at Jack—"Do you understand me?"

Jack, who was tolerably quick at a chance, now began to see how things were, and to fathom Mr. Puffington's mistake.

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His ready imagination immediately saw there might be something made of it, so he prepared to keep up the delusion.

"*Wh-o-o-y!*" said he, straddling out his legs, clasping his hands together, and squinting steadily through his spectacles, to try and see, by Puffington's countenance, how much he would stand. "*W-h-o-o-y!*" repeated he, "I shouldn't think—though, mind, it's mere conjectur' on my part—that you couldn't offer him less than—twenty or five-and-twenty pounds; or, say, from that to thirty," continued Jack, seeing that Puff's countenance remained complacent under the rise.

"And that you think would be sufficient?" asked Puff; adding—"If one does a thing at all, you know, it's as well to do it handsomely."

"True," replied Jack, sticking out his great thick lips, "true. I'm a great advocate for doing things handsomely. Many a row I have with my lord for thanking fellows, and saying he'll *remember* them, instead of giving them sixpence or a shilling; but really I should say, if you were to give him forty or fifty pound—say a fifty-pound note, he'd be——"

The rest of the sentence was lost by the appearance of Mr. Sponge, cantering up the avenue on the conspicuous piebald. Mr. Puffington and Mr. Spraggon greeted him as he alighted at the door.

Sponge was quickly followed by Tom Washball; then came Charley Slapp and Lumpleg, and Captain Guano came in a gig. Mutual bows and bobs and shakes of the hand being exchanged, amid offers of "anything before dinner" from the host, the guests were at length shown to their respective apartments, from which in due time they emerged, looking like so many bridegrooms.

First came the worthy master of the hounds himself, in his scarlet dress-coat, lined with white satin; Tom Washball and Charley Slapp also sported Puff's uniform; while Captain Guano, who was proud of his leg, sported the uniform of the Muffington Hunt—a pea-green coat lined with yellow, and a yellow collar, white shorts with gold garters, and black silk stockings.

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Spraggon had been obliged to put up with Lord Scamperdale's second best coat, his lordship having taken the best one himself; but it was passable enough by candle light, and the seediness of the blue cloth was relieved by a velvet collar and a new set of the Flat Hat Hunt buttons. Mr. Sponge wore a plain scarlet with a crimson velvet collar, and a bright fox on the frosted ground of a gilt button, with tights as before; and when Mr. Crane arrived he was found to be attired in a dress composed partly of Mr. Puffington's, and partly of the Muggeridge Hunt uniform—the red coat of the former surmounting the white shorts and black stockings of the other. Altogether, however, they were uncommonly smart, and it is to be hoped that they appreciated each other.

The dinner was sumptuous. Puff, of course, was in the chair; and Captain Guano coming last into the room, and being very fond of office, was vice. When men run to the "noble science" of gastronomy, they generally outstrip the ladies in the art of dinner-giving, for they admit of no make-weight, or merely ornamental dishes, but concentrate the cook's energies on sterling and approved dishes. Everything men set on is meant to be eat. Above all, men are not too fine to have the plate-warmer in the room, the deficiency of hot plates proving fatal to many a fine feast. It was evident that Puff prided himself on his table. His linen was the finest and whitest, his glass the most elegant and transparent, his plate the brightest, and his wines the most costly and *recherché*. Like many people, however, who are not much in the habit of dinner-giving, he was anxious and fussy, too intent upon making people comfortable to allow of their being so, and too anxious to get victuals and drink down their throats to allow of their enjoying either.

He not only produced a tremendous assortment of wines—Hock, Sauterne, Champagne, Barsack, Burgundy, but descended into endless varieties of sherries and Madeiras. These he pressed upon people, always insisting that the last sample was the best.

In these hospitable exertions Puffington was ably assisted by

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Captain Guano, who, being fond of wine, came in for a good quantity ; first of all by asking every one to take wine with him, and then in return every one asking him to do the same with them. The present absurd non-asking system was not then in vogue. The great captain, noisy and talkative at all times, began to be boisterous almost before the cloth was drawn.

Puffington was equally promiscuous with his after-dinner wines. He had all sorts of clarets, and "curious old ports." The party did not seem to have any objection to spoil their digestions for the next day, and took whatever he produced with great alacrity. Lengthened were the candle examinations, solemn the sips, and sounding the smacks that preceded the delivery of their Campbell-like judgments.

The conversation, which at first was altogether upon wine, gradually diverged upon sporting, and they presently brewed up a very considerable cry. Foremost among the noisy ones was Captain Guano. He seemed inclined to take the shine out of everybody.

"Oh ! if they could but find a good fox that would give them a run of ten miles—say, ten miles—just ten miles would satisfy him—say, from Barnesley Wold to Chingforde Wood, or from Carleburg Clump to Wetherden Head. He was going to ride his famous horse Jack-a-dandy—the finest horse that ever was foaled ! No day too long for him—no pace too great for him—no fence too stiff for him—no brook too broad for him."

Tom Washball, too, talked as if wearing a red coat was not the only purpose for which he hunted ; and altogether they seemed to be an amazing, sporting, hard-riding set.

When at length they rose to go to bed, it struck each man as he followed his neighbour upstairs that the one before him walked very crookedly.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

A DAY WITH PUFFINGTON'S HOUNDS.



DAY dawned cheerfully. If there was rather more sun than the strict rules of Beckford prescribe, still sunshine is not a thing to quarrel with under any circumstances—certainly not for a gentleman to quarrel with who wants his place seen to advantage on the occasion of a meet of hounds. Everything at Hanby House was in apple-pie order. All the stray leaves that the capricious wintry winds still kept raising from unknown quarters, and whisking about the trim lawns, were hunted and caught, while a heavy roller passed over the Kensington gravel, pressing out the hoof and wheel-marks of the previous day. The servants were up betimes, preparing the house for those that were in it, and a *déjeuner à la fourchette* for chance customers, from without.

They were equally busy at the stable. Although Mr. Bragg did profess such indifference for Mr. Sponge's opinion, he nevertheless thought it might perhaps be as well to be condescending to the stranger. Accordingly, he ordered his whips to be on the alert, to tie their ties and put on their boots as they ought to be, and to hoist their caps becomingly on the appearance of our friend. Bragg, like a good many huntsmen, had a sort of tariff of politeness, that he indicated by the manner in which he saluted the field. To a lord, he made a sweep of his cap like the dome of St. Paul's; a baronet came in for about half as much; a knight, to a quarter. Bragg had also a sort of City or monetary tariff of politeness—a tariff that

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was oftener called in requisition than the "Debrett" one, in Mr. Puffington's country. To a good "tip" he vouchsafed as much cap as he gave to a lord; to a middling "tip," he gave a sort of move that might either pass for a touch of the cap or a more comfortable adjustment of it to his head; a very small "tip" had a forefinger to the peak; while he who gave nothing at all got a good stare or a Good morning! or something of that sort. A man watching the arrival of the field could see who gave the fives, who the fours, who the threes, who the twos, who the ones, and who were the great 0's.

But to our day with Mr. Puffington's hounds.

Our overnight friends were not quite so brisk in the morning as the servants and parties outside. Puffington's "mixture" told upon a good many of them. Washball had a headache, so had Lumpleg; Crane was seedy; and Captain Guano, sea-green. Soda-water was in great request.

There was a splendid breakfast, the table and sideboard looking as if Fortnum and Mason or Morel had opened a branch establishment at Hanby House. Though the staying guests could not do much for the good things set out, they were not wasted, for the place was fairly taken by storm shortly before the advertised hour of meeting; and what at one time looked like a most extravagant supply, at another seemed likely to prove a deficiency. Each man helped himself to whatever he fancied, without waiting for the ceremony of an invitation, in the usual style of fox-hunting hospitality.

A few minutes before eleven, a "*gently* Rantaway," accompanied by a slight crack of a whip, drew the seedy and satisfied parties to the auriol window, to see Mr. Bragg pass along with his hounds. They were just gliding noiselessly over the green-sward, Mr. Bragg rising in his stirrups, as spruce as a game-cock, with his thorough-bred bay gambolling and pawing with delight at the frolic of the hounds, some clustering around him, others shooting forward a little, as if to show how obediently they would return at his whistle. Mr. Bragg was known as the whistling huntsman, and was a great man for telegraphing and signalling with his arms, boasting that he could make

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hounds so handy that they could do everything, except pay the turnpike-gates. At his appearance the men all began to shuffle to the passage and entrance-hall, to look for their hats and whips; and presently there was a great outpouring of red coats upon the lawn, all straddling and waddling of course. Then Mr. Bragg, seeing an audience, with a slight whistle and wave of his right arm, wheeled his forces round, and trotted gaily towards where our guests had grouped themselves, within the light iron railing that separated the smooth slope from the field. As he reined in his horse, he gave his cap an aerial sweep, taking off perpendicularly, and finishing at his horse's ears—an example that was immediately followed by the whips, and also by Mr. Bragg's second horseman, Tom Stot.

“Good morning, Mister Bragg!—Good morning, Mister Bragg!—Good morning, Mister Bragg!” burst from the assembled spectators: for Mr. Bragg was one of those people that one occasionally meets whom everybody “Misters.” Mister Bragg, rising in his stirrups with a gracious smile, passed a very polite bow along the line.

“Here's a fine morning, Mr. Bragg,” observed Tom Washball, who thought it knowing to talk to servants.

“Yas, sir,” replied Bragg, “yas,” with a slight inclination to cap; “*r-a-y*-ther more *san*, p'raps, than desirable,” continued he, raising his face towards the heavens; “but still by no means a bad day, sir—no, sir—by no means a bad day, sir.”

“Hounds looking well,” observed Charley Slapp between the whiffs of a cigar.

“Yas, sir,” said Bragg—“yas,” looking round them with a self-satisfied smile; adding, “so they ought, sir—so they ought; if *I* can't bring a pack out as they should be, don't know who can.”

“Why, here's our old Rummager, I declare!” exclaimed Spraggon, who, having vaulted the iron hurdles, was now among the pack. “Why, here's our old Rummager, I declare!” repeated he, laying his whip on the head of a solemn-looking black and white hound, somewhat down in the toes, and looking as if he was about done.

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"*Sc-e-e-use* me, sir," replied Bragg, leaning over his horse's shoulder, and whispering into Jack's ear; "*sc-e-e-use* me, sir, but *drop* that, sir, if you please, sir."

"Drop what?" asked Jack, squinting through his great tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles up into Bragg's face.

"'Bout knowing of that 'ound, sir," whispered Bragg; "the fact is, sir,—we call him *Merryman*, sir; master don't know I got him from you, sir."

"*O-o-o*," replied Jack, squinting, if possible, more frightfully than before.

"Ah, that's the hound I offered to Scamperdale," observed Puffington, seeing the movement, and coming up to where Jack stood; "that's the hound I offered to Scamperdale," repeated he, taking the old dog's head between his hands. "There's no better hound in the world than this," continued he, patting and smoothing him; "and no better *bred* hound either," added he, rubbing the dog's sides with his whip.

"How is he bred?" asked Jack, who knew the hound's pedigree better than he did his own.

"Why, I got him from Reynard,—no, I mean from Downey-bird—the Duke, you know; but he was bred by Fitzwilliam—by his Singwell out of Darling, Singwell was by the Rutland Rallywood out of Tavistock Rhapsody; but to make a long story short, he's lineally descended from the Beaufort Justice."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Jack, hardly able to contain himself; "that's undeniable blood."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say so," replied Puffington. "I'm glad to hear you say so, for you understand these things—no man better; and I confess I've a warm side to that Beaufort Justice blood."

"Don't wonder at it," replied Jack, laughing his waistcoat strings off.

"The great Mr. Warde," continued Mr. Puffington, "who was justly partial to his own sort, had never any objection to breeding from the Beaufort Justice."

"No, nor anybody else that knew what he was about," replied Jack, turning away to conceal his laughter.

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"We should be moving, I think, sir," observed Bragg, anxious to put an end to the conversation; "we should be moving, I think, sir," repeated he, with a rap of his forefinger against his cap peak. "It's past eleven," added he, looking at his gold watch, and shutting it against his cheek.

"What do you draw first?" asked Jack.

"Draw—draw—draw," replied Puffington. "Oh, we'll draw Rabbitborough Gorse—that's a new cover I've enclosed on my pro-o-rperty."

"*Sc-e-e-use* me, sir," replied Bragg, with a smile, and another rap of the cap: "*sc-e-e-use* me, sir, but I'm going to Hollyburn Hanger first."

"Ah, well, Hollyburn Hanger," replied Puffington, complacently; "either will do very well."

If Puff had proposed Hollyburn Hanger, Bragg would have said Rabbitborough Gorse.

The move of the hounds caused a rush of gentlemen to their horses, and there were the usual scramblings up, and fidgetings, and funkings, and *who-o-hayings* and drawing of girths, and taking up of curbs, and lengthening and shortening of stirrups.

Captain Guano couldn't get his stirrups to his liking anyhow. "'Ord hang these leathers," roared he, clutching up a stirrup-iron; "who the devil would ever have sent one out a-huntin' with a pair of new stirrup-leathers?"

"Hang you and the stirrup-leathers," growled the groom as his master rode away; "you're always wantin' sumfin to find fault with. I'm blowed if it arn't a disgrace to an 'oss to carry such a man," added he, eyeing the chestnut fidgeting and wincing as the captain worked away at the stirrups.

Mr. Bragg trotted briskly on with the hounds, preceded by Joe Banks the first whip, and having Jack Swipes, the second, and Tom Stot, riding together behind him, to keep off the crowd.

Thus the cavalcade swept down the avenue, crossed the Swillingford turnpike, and took through a well-kept field road, which speedily brought them to the cover—rough, broomy, brushwood-covered banks, of about three acres in extent, lying

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on either side of the little Hollyburn Brook, one of the tiny streams that in angry times helped to swell the Swill into a river.

"Dim all these foot people!" exclaimed Mr. Bragg, in well-feigned disgust, as he came in view, and found all the Swillingford snobs, all the tinkers, and tailors, and cobblers, and poachers, and sheep-stealers, all the scowling, rotten-fustianed, baggy-pocketed scamps of the country ranged round the cover, some with dogs, some with guns, some with snares, and all with sticks or staffs. "Well, I'm dimmed if ever I seed sich a——" The rest of the speech being lost amidst the exclamations of—"A! the hunds! the hunds! hoop! tally-o the hunds!" and a general rush of the ruffians to meet them.

Captain Guano, who had now come up, joined in the denunciation, inwardly congratulating himself on the probability that the first cover, at least, would be drawn blank.

Tom Washball, who was riding a very troublesome tailforemost grey, also censured the proceeding.

And Mr. Puffington, still an "amaazin' instance of a pop'lar man," exclaimed, as he rode among them, "Ah! my good fellows, I'd rather you'd come up and had some ale than disturbed the cover;" a hint that the wily ones immediately took, rushing up to the house and availing themselves of the absence of the butler, who had followed the hounds, to take a couple of dozen of his best fiddle-handled forks while the footman was drawing them the ale.

The whips being duly signalled by Bragg to their points—Banks to the north corner, Swipes to the south—and the field being at length drawn up to his liking, Mr. Bragg looked at Mr. Puffington for his signal (the only piece of interference he allowed him), at a nod Mr. Bragg gave a wave of his cap, and the pack dashed into cover with a cry—

"*Yo-o-icks—wind him! Yo-o-icks—pash him up!*" cheered Bragg, standing erect in his stirrups, eyeing the hounds spreading and sniffing about, now this way, now that—now pushing through a thicket, now threading and smelling along

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a meuse. "*Yo-o-icks—wind him! Yo-o-icks—pash him up!*" repeated he, cracking his whip, and moving slowly on. He then varied the entertainment by whistling in a sharp, shrill key, something like the chirp of a sparrow-hawk.

Thus the hounds rummaged and scrimmaged for some minutes.

"No fox here," observed Captain Guano, bringing his horse alongside of Mr. Bragg's.

"Not so sure o' *that*," replied Mr. Bragg, with a sneer, for he had a great contempt for the captain. "Not so sure o' that," replied he, eyeing Thunderer and Galloper feathering up the brook.

"Hang these stirrups!" exclaimed the captain, again attempting to adjust them; adding, "I declare I have no seat whatever in this saddle."

"Nor in any other," muttered Bragg. "*Yo-icks, Galloper! Yo-icks, Thunderer! Ge-e-nily, Warrior!*" continued he, cracking his whip, as Warrior pounced at a bunny.

The hounds were evidently on a scent, hardly strong enough to own, but sufficiently indicated by their feathering, and the rush of their comrades to the spot.

"A fox for a thousand!" exclaimed Mr. Bragg, eyeing them, and looking at his watch.

"Oh, d—mn me! I've got one stirrup longer than another now!" roared Captain Guano, trying the fresh adjustment. "I've got one stirrup longer than another!" added he, in a terrible pucker.

A low snatch of a whimper now proceeded from Galloper, and Bragg cheered him to the echo. In another second a great banging brown fox burst from among the broom, and dashed down the little dean. What noises, what exclamations rent the air! "*Talliho! talliho! talliho!*" screamed a host of voices, in every variety of intonation, from the half frantic yell of a party seeing him, down to the shout of a mere partaker of the epidemic. Shouting is very contagious. The horsemen gathered up their reins, pressed down their hats, and threw away their cigar-ends.



CAPTAIN GUANO'S NEW STIRRUP-LEATHERS.

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"'Ord hang it!" roared Captain Guano, still fumbling at the leathers, "I shall never be able to ride with stirrups in this state."

"Hang your stirrups!" exclaimed Charley Slapp, shooting past him, adding, "It was your *saddle* last time."

Bragg's queer tootle of his horn, for he was full of strange blows, now sounded at the low end of the cover; and, having a pet line of gaps and other conveniences that he knew how to turn to on the minute, he soon shot so far ahead as to give him the appearance (to the slow 'uns) of having flown. Brick and Swipes quickly had all the hounds after him, and Stot, dropping his elbows, made for the road, to ride the second horse gently on the line. The field, as usual, divided into two parts, the soft riders and the hard ones—the soft riders going by the fields, the hard riders by the road. Messrs. Spraggon, Sponge, Slapp, Quilter, Rasper, Crasher, Smasher, and some half-dozen more, bustled after Bragg; while the worthy master Mr. Puffington, Lumpleg, Washball, Crane, Guano, Shirker, and very many others, came pounding along the lane. There was a good scent, and the hounds shot across the Fleecyhaughwater Meadows, over the hill, to the village of Berrington Roothings, where, the fox having been chased by a cur, the hounds were brought to a check on some very bad scenting-ground, on the common, a little to the left of the village, at the end of a quarter of an hour or so. The road having been handy, the hard riders were there almost as soon as the soft ones; and there being no impediments on the common, they all pushed boldly on among the now stooping hounds.

"*Hold hard*, gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Bragg, rising in his stirrups, and telegraphing with his right arm. "Hold hard!—*pray do!*" added he, with little better success. "Dim it, gen'lemen, hold hard!" added he, as they still pressed upon the pack. "Have a little regard for a huntsman's reputation," continued he. "Remember that it rises and falls with the sport he shows"—exhortations that seemed to be pretty well lost upon the field, who began comparing notes as to their respective achievements, enlarging the leaps and magnifying the distance

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into double what they had been. Puffington and some of the fat ones sat gasping and mopping their brows.

Seeing there was not much chance of the hounds hitting off the scent by themselves, Mr. Bragg began telegraphing with his arm to the whippers-in, much in the manner of the captain of a Thames steamer to the lad at the engine, and forthwith they drove the pack on for our swell huntsman to make his cast. As good luck would have it, Bragg crossed the line of the fox before he had got half through his circle, and away the hounds dashed, at a pace and with a cry that looked very like killing. Mr. Bragg was in ecstasies, and rode in a manner very contrary to his wont. All again was life, energy, and action; and even some who hoped there was an end of the thing, and that they might go home and say, as usual, "that they had had a very good run, but not killed," were induced to proceed.

Away they all went as before.

At the end of eighteen minutes more the hounds ran into their fox in the little green valley below Mountnessing Wood, and Mr. Bragg had him stretched on the green with the pack baying about him, and the horses of the field-riders getting led about by the country people, while the riders stood glorying in the splendour of the thing. All had a direct interest in making it out as good as possible, and Mr. Bragg was quite ready to appropriate as much praise as ever they liked to give.

"'Ord dim him," said he, turning up the fox's grim head with his foot, "but Mr. Bragg's an awkward customer for gen'lemen of your description."

"You hunted him *well*!" exclaimed Charley Slapp, who was trumpeter general of the establishment.

"Oh, sir," replied Bragg, with a smirk and a condescending bow, "if Richard Bragg can't kill foxes, I don't know who can."

Just then "Puffington and Co." hove in sight up the valley, their faces beaming with delight as the *tableau* before them told the tale. They hastened to the spot.

"How many brace is that?" asked Puffington, with the most

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matter-of-course air, as he trotted up, and reined in his horse outside the circle.

"*Seventeen brace*, your grace, I mean to say my lord, that's to say *sur*," replied Bragg, with a strong emphasis on the *sur*, as if to say, "I'm not used to you snobs of Commoners."

"*Seventeen brace!*" sneered Jack Spraggon to Sponge; adding, in a whisper, "More like *seven* foxes."

"And how many run to ground?" asked Puffington, alighting.

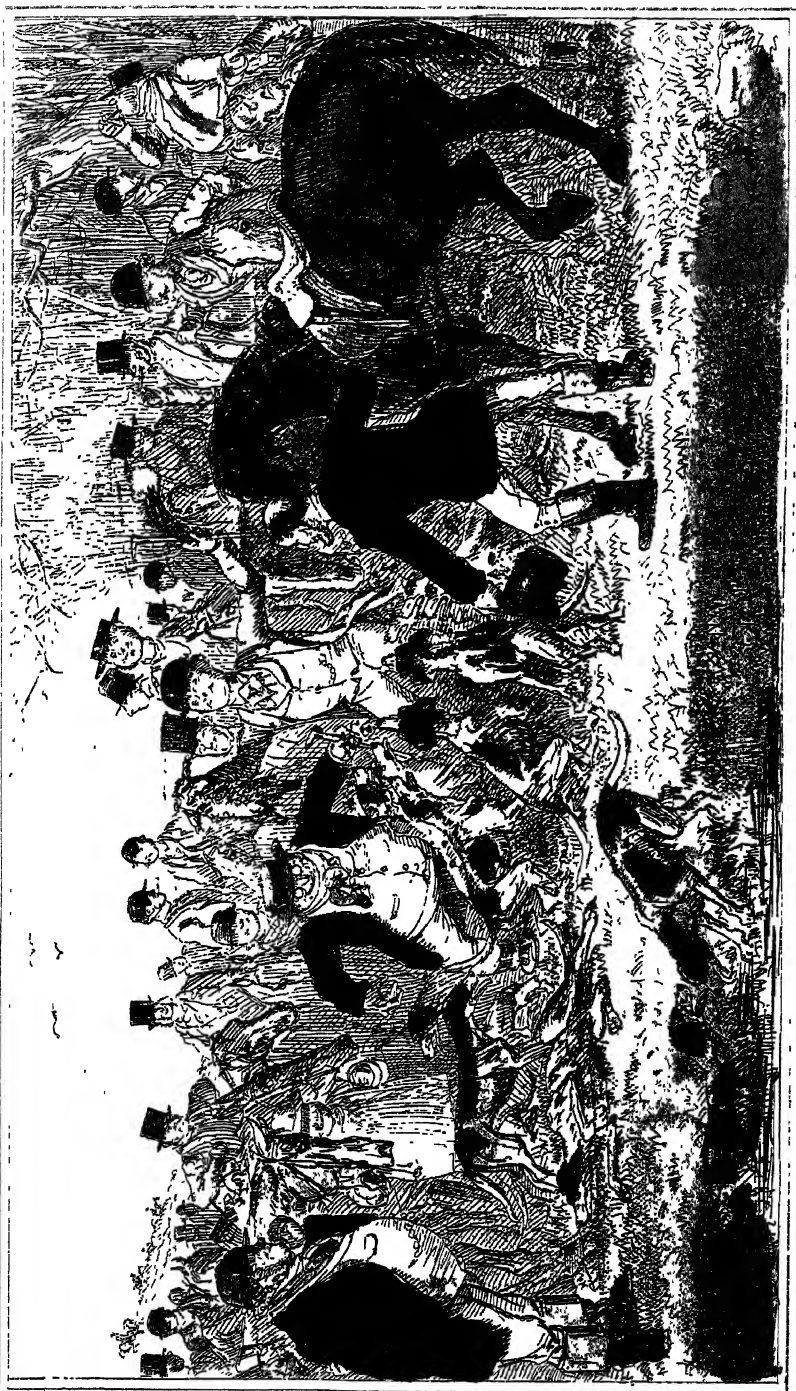
"*Four brace*," replied Bragg, stooping to cut off the brush.

We were wrong in saying that Bragg only allowed Puff the privilege of nodding his head to say when he might throw off. He let him lead the "lie gallop" in the kill department.

Mr. Puffington then presented Mr. Sponge with the brush, and the usual solemnities being observed, the sherry flasks were produced and drained, the biscuits munched, and, amidst the smoke of cigars, the ring broke up in great good will.



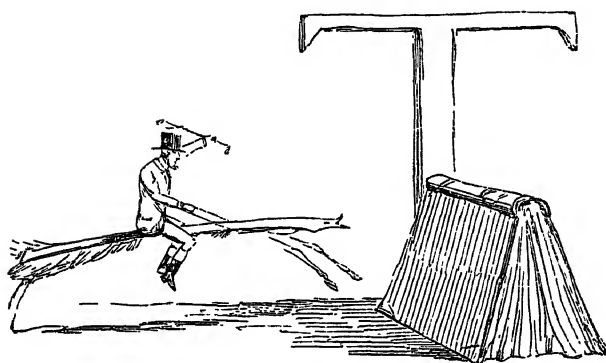
A Good Run.



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CHAPTER XL.

WRITING A RUN.



A Running Writer.

HE first fumes of excitement over, after a run with a kill, the field begin to take things more coolly and veraciously, and ere long some of them begin to pick holes in

the affair. The men of the hunt run it up, while those of the next hunt run it down. Added to this, there are generally some cavilling, captious fellows in every field, who extol a run to the master's face, and abuse it behind his back. So it was on the present occasion. The men of the hunt—Charley Slapp, Lumpleg, Guano, Crane, Washball, and others—lauded and magnified it into something magnificent; while Fossick, Fyle, Wake, Blossomnose, and others of the “flat-hat hunt,” pronounced it a niceish thing—a pretty burst; and Mr. Vosper, who had hunted for five-and-twenty seasons without ever subscribing one farthing to hounds, always declaring that each season was “his last,” or that he was going to confine himself entirely to some other pack, said it was nothing to make a row about, that he had seen fifty better things with the Tinglebury harriers, and never a word said.

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"Well," said Sponge to Spraggon, between the whiffs of a cigar, as they rode together; "it wasn't so bad, was it?"

"Bad!—no," squinted Jack, "devilish good—for Puff, at least," adding, "I question he's had a better this season."

"Well, we are in luck," observed Tom Washball, riding up and joining them; "we are in luck to have a satisfactory thing with you great connoisseurs out."

"A pretty thing enough," replied Jack, "pretty thing enough."

"Oh, I don't mean to say it's equal to many we've had this season," replied Washball; "nothing like the Boughton Hill day, nor yet the Hembury Forest one; but still, considering the meet and the state of the country——"

"Hout! the country's good enough," growled Jack, who hated Washball; adding, "A good fox makes any country good;" with which observation he sidled up to Sponge, leaving Washball in the middle of the road.

"That reminds me," said Jack, *sotto voce* to Sponge, "that the crittur wants his run puffed, and he thinks you can do it."

"Me!" exclaimed Sponge, "what's put that in his head?"

"Why, you see," exclaimed Jack, "the first time you came out with our hounds at Dundleton Tower, you'll remember—or rather, the first time we saw you, when your horse ran away with you—somebody, Fyle, I think it was, said you were a literary cove; and Puff, catchin' at the idea, has never been able to get rid of it since; and the fact is, he'd like to be flattered—he'd be uncommonly pleased if you were to 'soft saudor' him handsomely."

"Me!" exclaimed Sponge; "bless your heart, man, I can't write anything—nothing fit to print, at least."

"Hout, fiddle!" retorted Spraggon, "you can write as well as any other man; see what lots of fellows write, and nobody ever finds fault."

"But the spellin' bothers one," replied Sponge, with a shake of his elbow and body, as if the idea was quite out of the question.

"Hang the spellin'," muttered Jack, "one can always borrow

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a dictionary; or let the man of the paper—the editor, as they call him—smooth out the spellin'. You say at the end of your letter, that your hands are cold, or your hand aches with holdin' a pullin' horse, and you'll thank him to correct any inadvertencies—you needn't call them errors, you know."

"But where's the use of it?" exclaimed Sponge; "it'll do us no good, you know, praisin' Puff's pack, or himself, or anything about him."

"That's just the point," said Jack, "that's just the point. I can make it answer both our purposes," said he, with a nudge of the elbow, and an inside-out squint of his eyes.

"Ah, that's another matter," replied our friend; "if we can turn the thing to account, well and good—I'm your man for a shy."

"We *can* turn it to account," rejoined Jack; "we *can* turn it to account—at least *I* can; but then you must do it. He wouldn't take it as any compliment from me. It's the stranger that sees all things in their true lights. D'ye understand?" asked he, eagerly.

"I twig," replied Sponge.

"You write the account," continued Jack, "and I'll manage the rest."

"You must help me," observed Sponge.

"Certainly," replied Jack; "we'll do it together, and go halves in the plunder."

"Humph," mused Sponge; "halves," said he to himself. "And what will you give me for my half?" asked he.

"Give you!" exclaimed Jack, brightening up. "Give you! Let me see," continued he, pretending to consider,—“Puff's rich—Puff's a liberal fellow—Puff's a conceited beggar—mix it strong,” said Jack, “and I'll give you ten pounds.”

"Make it twelve," replied Sponge, after a pause.

If Jack had said twelve, Sponge would have asked fourteen.

"Couldn't," said Jack, with a shake of the head; "it really isn't with (worth) the money."

The two then rode on in silence for some little distance.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Jack, spurring his horse, and

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trotting up the space that the other had now shot ahead. "I'll split the difference with you!"

"Well, give me the sov.," said Sponge, holding out his hand for earnest."

"Why, I havn't a sov. upon me," replied Jack; "but, honour bright, I'll do what I say."

"Give me eleven golden sovereigns for my chance," repeated Sponge, slowly, in order that there might be no mistake.

"Eleven golden sovereigns for your chance," repeated Jack.

"Done!" replied Sponge.

"Done!" repeated Jack.

"Let's jog on and do it at once while the thing's fresh in our minds," said Jack, working his horse into a trot.

Sponge did the same; and the grass siding of Orlantire Park wall favouring their design, they increased the trot to a canter. They soon passed the park's bounds, and entering upon one of those rarities—an unenclosed common, angled its limits so as to escape the side-bar, and turning up Farningham Green lane, came out upon the Kingsworth and Swillingford turnpike within sight of Hanby House.

"We'd better pull up and walk the horses gently in, p'raps," observed Sponge, reining his in.

"Ah! I was only wantin' to get home before the rest," observed Jack, pulling up too.

They then proceeded more leisurely together.

"We'd better get into one of our bed-rooms to do it," observed Jack, as they passed the lodge.

"Just so," replied Sponge; adding, "I daresay we shall want all the quiet we can get."

"Oh, no!" said Jack; "the thing's simple enough—met at such a place—found at such another—killed at so and so."

"Well, I hope it will," said Sponge, riding into the stable-yard, and resigning his steed to the care of his groom.

Jack did the same by Sponge's other horse, which he had been riding; and in reply to Leather's enquiry (who stood with his right hand ready, as if to shake hands with him), "how the horse had carried him?" replied—



"YOU'RE A GEN'LEMAN, YOU ARE!"

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"Cursed ill," and stamped away without giving him anything.

"An' *you're* a gen'leman, you are," muttered Leather, as he led the horse away.

"Now come!" exclaimed Jack to Sponge, "come! let's get in before any of those bothersome fellows come;" adding, as he dived into a passage, "I'll show you the back way."

After passing a scullery, a root-house, and a spacious entrance-hall, upon a table in which stood the perpetual beer-jug and bread-basket, a green baize door let them into the regions of upper service, and passing the dashed carpets of the house-keeper's room and butler's pantry, a red baize door let them into the far side of the front entrance. Having deposited their hats and whips, they bounded up the richly-carpeted staircase to their rooms.

Hanby House, as we have already said, was splendidly furnished. All the grandeur did not run to the entertaining rooms; but each particular apartment, from the state bed-room down to the smallest bachelor snugery, was replete with elegance and comfort.

Like many houses, however, the bed-rooms possessed every imaginable luxury, except boot-jacks and pens that would write. In Sponge's room, for instance, there were hip-baths, and foot-baths, a shower bath, and hot and cold baths adjoining, and mirrors innumerable; an eight-day mantel-clock, by Moline, of Geneva, that struck the hours, half-hours, and quarters; cut-glass toilet candlesticks, with silver sconces; an elegant zebra-wood cabinet; also a beautiful Davenport of zebra-wood, with a plate-glass back, containing a pen rug worked on silver ground, an ebony match box, a blue crystal, containing a sponge pen-wiper, a beautiful envelope-case, a white-cornelian seal, with "Hanby House" upon it, wax of all colours, paper of all textures, envelopes without end—every imaginable requirement of correspondence except a pen that would write. There *were* pens, indeed—there almost always are—but they were miserable apologies of things; some were mere crow-quills—sort of cover-hacks of pens, while others were great, clumsy, heavy-heeled,

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cart-horse sort of things, clotted up to the hocks with ink, or split all the way through—vexatious apologies that throw a person over just at the critical moment when he has got his sheet prepared and his ideas all ready to pour upon paper; then splut—splut—splutter goes the pen, and away goes the train of thought. Bold is the man who undertakes to write his letters in his bed-room with country house pens. But to our friends. Jack and Sponge slept next door to each other; Sponge, as we have already said, occupying the state-room, with its canopy-top bedstead, carved and panelled sides, and elegant chintz curtains lined with pink, and massive silk-and-bullion tassels; while Jack occupied the dressing-room, which was the state bed-room in miniature, only a good deal more comfortable. The rooms communicated with double doors, and our friends very soon effected a passage.

“Have you any ’baccy?” asked Jack, waddling in in his slippers, after having sucked off his tops without the aid of a boot-jack.

“There’s some in my jacket-pocket,” replied Sponge, nodding to where it hung in the wardrobe; “but it won’t do to smoke here, will it?” asked he.

“Why not?” inquired Jack.

“Such a fine room,” replied Sponge, looking around.

“Oh, fine be hanged!” replied Jack; adding, as he made for the jacket, “no place too fine for smokin’ in.”

Having helped himself to one of the best cigars, and lighted it, Jack composed himself cross-legged in an easy, spring, stuffed chair, while Sponge fussed about among the writing implements, watering and stirring up the clotted ink, and denouncing each pen in succession, as he gave it the initiatory trial in writing the word “Sponge.”

“Curse the pens!” exclaimed he, throwing the last bright crisp yellow thing from him in disgust. “There’s not one among ’em that can go!—all reg’larly stumped up.”

“Haven’t you a penknife?” asked Jack, taking the cigar out of his mouth.

“Not I,” replied Sponge.

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"Take a razor, then," said Jack, who was good at an expedient.

"I'll take one of yours," said Sponge, going into the dressing-room for one.

"Hang it, but you're rather too sharp," exclaimed Jack, with a shake of his head.

"It's more than your razor 'll be when I'm done with it," replied Sponge.

Having at length, with the aid of Jack's razor, succeeded in getting a pen that would write, Mr. Sponge selected a sheet of best cream-laid satin paper, and taking a cane-bottomed chair, placed himself at the table in an attitude for writing. Dipping the fine yellow pen in the ink, he looked in Jack's face for an idea. Jack, who had now got well advanced in his cigar, sat squinting through his spectacles at our scribe, though apparently looking at the top of the bed.

"Well," said Sponge, with a look of inquiry.

"Well," replied Jack, in a tone of indifference.

"How shall I begin?" asked Sponge, twirling the pen between his fingers, and spluttering the ink over the paper.

"Begin!" replied Jack, "begin, oh, begin, just as you usually begin."

"As a letter?" asked Sponge.

"I s'pose so," replied Jack; "how would you think?"

"O, I don't know," replied Sponge. "Will *you* try your hand?" added he, holding out the pen.

"Why, I'm busy just now, you see," said he, pointing to his cigar, "and that horse of yours (Jack had ridden the redoubtable chestnut, Multum in Parvo, who had gone very well in the company of Hercules) pulled so confoundedly that I've almost lost the use of my fingers," continued he, working away as if he had got the cramp in both hands; "but I'll prompt you," added he, "I'll prompt you."

"Why don't you begin, then?" asked Sponge.

"Begin!" exclaimed Jack, taking the cigar from his lips; "begin!" repeated he, "oh, I'll begin directly—didn't know you were ready."

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Jack then threw himself back in his chair, and sticking out his little bandy legs, turned the whites of his eyes up to the ceiling, as if lost in meditation.

"Begin," said he, after a pause, "begin, 'This splendid pack had a stunning run.'"

"But we must put *what* pack first," observed Sponge, writing the words "Mr. Puffington's hounds" at the top of the paper. "Well," said he, writing on, "this stunning pack had a splendid run."

"No, not stunning *pack*," growled Jack, "*splendid* pack—'this splendid pack had a stunning run.'"

"Stop!" exclaimed Sponge, writing it down; "well," said he, looking up, "I've got it."

"This stunning pack had a splendid run," repeated Jack, squinting away at the ceiling.

"I thought you said *splendid* pack," observed Sponge.

"So I did," replied Jack.

"You said stunning just now," rejoined he.

"Ah, that was a slip of the tongue," said Jack. "This splendid pack had a stunning run," repeated Jack, appealing again to his cigar for inspiration; "well then," said he, after a pause, "you just go on as usual, you know," continued he, with a flourish of his great red hand.

"As usual!" exclaimed Sponge, "you don't s'pose one's pen goes of itself."

"Why no," replied Jack, knocking the ashes off his cigar on to the arabesque-patterned tapestry carpet—"why no, not exactly; but these things, you know, are a good deal matter of course; just describe what you saw, you know, and butter Puff well, that's the main point."

"But you forget," replied Sponge, "I don't know the country, I don't know the people, I don't know anything at all about the run—I never once looked at the hounds."

"That's nothin'," replied Jack, "there'd be plenty like you in that respect. However," continued he, gathering himself up in his chair as if for an effort, "you can say—let me see what you can say—you can say, 'this splendid pack had a stunning run

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from Hollyburn Hanger, the property of its truly popular master, Mr. Puffington,' or—stop," said Jack, checking himself, "say, 'the property of its truly popular and sporting master, Mr. Puffington.' The cover's just as much mine as it's his," observed Jack; "it belongs to old Sir Timothy Tensthemain, who's vegetating at Boulogne-sur-mer, but Puff says he'll buy it when it comes to the hammer, so we'll flatter him by considering it his already, just as we flatter him by calling him a sportsman—*sportsman!*" added Jack, with a sneer, "he's just as much taste for the thing as a cow."

"Well," said Sponge, looking up, "I've got 'truly popular and sporting master, Mr. Puffington,'" adding, "hadn't we better say something about the meet and the grand spread here before we begin with the run?"

"True," replied Jack, after a long-drawn whiff and another adjustment of the end of his cigar; "say that 'a splendid field of well-appointed sportsmen——'"

"A splendid field of well-appointed sportsmen," wrote Sponge.

"Among whom we recognised several distinguished strangers and members of Lord Scamperdale's hunt.' That means you and I," observed Jack.

"Of Lord Scamperdale's hunt—that means you and I'"—read Sponge, as he wrote it.

"But you're not to put in that; you're not to write 'that means you and I,' my man," observed Jack.

"Oh, I thought that was part of the sentence," replied Sponge.

"No, no," said Jack; "I meant to say that you and I were the distinguished strangers and members of Lord Scamperdale's hunt; but that's between ourselves you know."

"Good," said Sponge; "then I'll strike that out," running his pen through the words "that means you and I." "Now get on," said he, appealing to Jack, adding, "we've a deal to do yet."

"Say," said Jack, "'after partaking of the well-known profuse and splendid hospitality of Hanby House, they

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proceeded at once to Hollyburn Hanger, where a fine seasoned fox '—though some said he was a bag one——"

"Did they?" exclaimed Sponge, adding, "well, I thought he went away rather queerly."

"Oh, it was only old Bung the brewer, who runs down every run he doesn't ride."

"Well, never mind," replied Sponge, "we'll make the best of it, whatever it was;" writing away as he spoke, and repeating the words "bag one" as he penned them.

"'Broke away,'" continued Jack—

"'In view of the whole field,'" added Sponge.

"Just so," assented Jack.

"'Every hound scoring to cry, and making the'—the—the—what d'ye call the thing?'" asked Jack.

"Country," suggested Sponge.

"No," replied Jack, with a shake of the head.

"Hill and dale?" tried Sponge again.

"Welkin!" exclaimed Jack, hitting it off himself—" 'makin' the welkin ring with their melody!' makin' the welkin *ring* with their melody," repeated he, with exultation.

"Capital!" observed Sponge, as he wrote it.

"Equal to Littlelegs,"* said Jack, squinting his eyes inside out.

"We'll make a grand thing of it," observed Sponge.

"So we will," replied Jack, adding, "if we had but a book of po'try we'd weave in some lines here. You haven't a book o' no sort with you that we could prig a little po'try from?" asked he.

"No," replied Sponge, thoughtfully. "I'm afraid not; indeed, I'm sure not. I've got nothin' but 'Mogg's Cab Fares.'"

"Ah, that won't do," observed Jack, with a shake of the head. "But stay," said he, "there are some books over yonder," pointing to the top of an Indian cabinet, and squinting in a totally different direction. "Let's see what they are," added he, rising, and stumping away to where they

* The Poetical Recorder of the Doings of the Dublin Garrison dogs, in *Bell's Life*.

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stood. "I Promessi Sposi," read he off the back of one: "what can that mean? Ah, it's Latin," said he, opening the volume. "Contes à ma Fille," read he off the back of another. "That sounds like racin'," observed he, opening the volume: "it's Latin, too," said he, returning it. "However, never mind, we'll 'sugar Puff's milk,' as Mr. Bragg would say, without po'try." So saying, Mr. Spraggon stumped back to his easy-chair. "Well, now," said he, seating himself comfortably in it, "let's see, where did we go first? 'He broke at the lower end of the cover, and crossing the brook, made straight for Fleecyhaugh Water Meadows, over which,' you may say, 'there's always a ravishing scent.'"

"Have you got that?" asked Jack, after what he thought a sufficient lapse of time for writing it.

"'Ravishing scent,'" repeated Sponge, as he wrote the words.

"Very good," said Jack, smoking and considering. "'From there,'" continued he, "'he made a bit of a bend, as if inclining for the plantations at Winstead, but, changing his mind, he faced the rising ground, and crossing over nearly the highest part of Shillington Hill, made direct for the little village of Berrington Roothings below——'"

"Stop!" exclaimed Sponge, "I haven't got half that; I've only got to 'the plantations at Winstead.'" Sponge made play with his pen, and presently held it up in token of being done.

"Well," pondered Jack, "there was a check there. Say," continued he, addressing himself to Sponge, "'Here the hounds came to a check.'"

"Here the hounds came to a check," wrote Sponge. "Shall we say anything about distance?" asked he.

"P'raps we may as well," replied Jack. "We shall have to stretch it though a bit."

"Let's see," continued he; "from the cover to Berrington Roothings over by Shillington Hill and Fleecyhaugh Water Meadows will be—say, two miles and a half or three miles at the most,—call it four, well four miles,—say four miles in twelve minutes, twenty miles an hour,—too quick,—four miles

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in fifteen minutes, sixteen miles an hour; no—I think p'raps it'll be safer to lump the distance at the end, and put in a place or two that nobody knows the name of, for the convenience of those who were not out."

"But those who *were* out will blab, won't they?" asked Sponge.

"Only to each other," replied Jack. "They'll all stand up for the truth of it as against strangers. You need never be afraid of over-eggin' the puddin' for those that were out."

"Well, then," observed Sponge, looking at his paper to report progress, "we've got the hounds to a check. 'Here the hounds came to a check,'" read he.

"Ah! now, then," said Jack, in a tone of disgust, "we must say summut handsome of Bragg; and of all conceited animals under the sun, he certainly is the most conceited. I never saw such a man! How that unfortunate, infatuated master of his keeps him, I can't for the life of me imagine. *Master!* faith, Bragg's the *master*," continued Jack, who now began to foam at the mouth. "He laughs at old Puff to his face; yet it's wonderful the influence Bragg has over him. I really believe he has talked Puff into believing that there's not such another huntsman under the sun, and really he's as great a muff as ever walked. He can just dress the character, and that's all." So saying, Jack wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his red coat preparatory to displaying Mr. Bragg upon paper.

"Well, now we are at fault," said Jack, motioning Sponge to resume; "we are at fault; now say, 'but Mr. Bragg, who had ridden gallantly on his favourite bay, as fine an animal as ever went, though somewhat past mark of mouth——' He is a good horse, at least *was*," observed Jack; adding, "I sold Puff him, he was one of old Sugarlip's," meaning Lord Scamperdale's.

"Sure to be a good'un then," replied Sponge, with a wink; adding, "I wonder if he'd like to buy any more."

"We'll talk about that after," replied Jack, "at present let us get on with our run."

"Well," says Sponge, "I've got it: 'Mr. Bragg, who had

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ridden gallantly on his favourite bay, as fine an animal as ever went, though somewhat past mark of mouth——’ ”

“ ‘Was well up with his hounds,’ ” continued Jack, “ ‘and with a *gently* Rantipole! and a single wave of his arm, proceeded to make one of those scientific casts for which this eminent huntsman is so justly celebrated.’ Justly *celebrated!* ” repeated Jack, spitting on the carpet with a hawk of disgust ; “ the conceited self-sufficient bantam-cock never made a cast worth a copper, or rode a yard but when he thought somebody was looking at him.”

“ I’ve got it,” said Sponge, who had plied his pen to good purpose.

“ Justly celebrated,” repeated Jack, with a snort. “ Well, then, say, ‘ Hitting off the scent like a workman,’—big H, you know, for a fresh sentence,—‘ they went away again at score, and passing by Moorlinch farm-buildings, and threading the strip of plantation by Bexley Burn, he crossed Silverbury Green, leaving Longford Hutch to the right, and passing straight on by the gibbet at Harpen.’ Those are all bits of places,” observed Jack, “ that none but the country folks know ; indeed, I shouldn’t have known them but for shootin’ over them when old Bloss lived at the Green. Well, now, have you got all that ? ” asked he.

“ ‘ Gibbet at Harpen,’ ” read Sponge, as he wrote it.

“ ‘ Here, then, the gallant pack, breaking from scent to view,’ ” continued Jack, speaking slowly, “ ‘ run into their fox in the open close upon Mountnessing Wood, evidently his point from the first, and into which a few more strides would have carried him. It was as fine a run as ever was seen, and the hunting of the hounds was the admiration of all who saw it. The distance couldn’t have been less than ’—than—— what shall we say ? ” asked Jack.

“ Ten, twelve miles as the crow flies,” suggested Sponge.

“ No,” said Jack, “ that would be too much. Say ten ; ” adding, “ that will be four more than it was.”

“ Never mind,” said Sponge, as he wrote it ; “ folks like good measure with runs as well as ribbons.”



JACK AND MR. SPONGE WRITING AN ARTICLE.

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

"Now we must butter Old Puff," observed Spraggon.

"What can we say for him?" asked Sponge; "that he never went off the road?"

"No, by Jove!" said Jack; "you'll spoil all if you do that: better leave it alone altogether than do that. Say, 'the justly popular owner of this most celebrated pack, though riding good fourteen stone' (he rides far more," observed Jack; "at least *sixteen*; but it'll please him to make out that he *can* ride fourteen), 'led the welters, on his famous chestnut horse, Tappey Lappey.'"

"What shall we say about the rest?" asked Sponge; "Lumpleg, Slapp, Guano, and all those?"

"Oh, say nothin'," replied Jack; "we've nothin' to do with nobody but Puff; and we couldn't mention them without bringin' in our Flat Hat men too, Blossomnose, Fyle, Fossick, and so on. Besides, it would spoil all to say that Guano was up—people would say directly it couldn't have been much of a run if Guano was there. You might finish off," observed Jack, after a pause, "by saying that, 'after this truly brilliant affair, Mr. Puffington, like a thorough sportsman, and one who never trashes his hounds unnecessarily—unlike some masters,' you may say, 'who never know when to leave off' (that will be a hit at Old Scamp," observed Jack, with a frightful squint), "'returned to Hanby House, where a distinguished party of sportsmen—' or, say, 'a distinguished party of noblemen and gentlemen'—that'll please the ass more—'a large party of noblemen and gentlemen were partaking of his'—his——what shall we call it?"

"Grub!" said Sponge.

"No, no—summut genteel—his—his—his—'*splendid hospitality!*'" concluded Jack, waving his arm triumphantly over his head.

"Hard work, authorship!" exclaimed Sponge, as he finished writing, and threw down the pen.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jack; adding, "I could go on for an hour."

"Ah, *you!*—that's all very well," replied Sponge, "for you,

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squatting comfortably in your arm-chair: but consider me, toiling with my pen, bothered with the writing, and craning at the spelling."

"Never mind, we've done it," replied Jack; adding, "Puff'll be as pleased as Punch. We've polished him off uncommon. That's just the sort of account to tickle the beggar. He'll go riding about the country, showing it to everybody, and wondering who wrote it."

"And what shall we send it to?—the *Sporting Magazine*, or what?" asked Sponge.

"*Sporting Magazine*!—no," replied Jack; "wouldn't be out till next year—quick's the word in these railway times. Send it to a newspaper—*Bell's Life*, or one of the Swillingford papers. Either of them would be glad to put it in."

"I hope they'll be able to read it," observed Sponge, looking at the blotched and scrawled manuscript.

"Trust them for that," replied Jack; adding, "If there's any word that bothers them, they've nothin' to do but look in the dictionary—these folks all have dictionaries, wonderful fellows for spellin'."

Just then a little buttony page, in green and gold, came in to ask if there were any letters for the post; and our friends hastily made up their packet, directing it to the editor of the Swillingford "GUIDE TO GLORY AND FREEMAN'S FRIEND;" words that in the hurried style of Mr. Sponge's penmanship looked very like "GUIDE TO GROG, AND FREEMAN'S FRIEND."

CHAPTER XLI.

LITERARY BLOOMER.



TIME was when the independent borough of Swillingford supported two newspapers, or rather two editors, the editor of the *Swillingford Patriot*, and the editor of the *Swillingford Guide to Glory*; but those were stirring days, when politics ran high and votes and corn commanded good prices. The papers were never very prosperous concerns, as may be supposed when we say that the circulation of the former at its best time was barely seven hundred, while that of the latter never exceeded a thousand.

They were both started at the reform times, when the reduction of the stamp-duty brought so many aspiring candidates for literary fame into the field, and for a time they were conducted with all the bitter hostility that a contracted neighbourhood, and a constant crossing by the editors of each other's path, could engender. The competition, too, for advertisements, was keen, and the editors were continually taunting each other with taking them for the duty alone. Æneas M'Quirter was the editor of the *Patriot*, and Felix Grimes that of the *Guide to Glory*.

M'Quirter, we need hardly say, was a Scotchman—a big, broad-shouldered Sawney—formidable in “slacks,” as he called his trousers, and terrific in kilts; while Grimes was a native of Swillingford, an ex-schoolmaster and parish clerk, and now an auctioneer, a hatter, a dyer and bleacher, a paper-hanger, to which the wits said when he set up his paper, he added the trade of “stainer.”

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At first the rival editors carried on a "war to the knife" sort of contest with one another, each denouncing his adversary in terms of the most unmeasured severity. In this they were warmly supported by a select knot of admirers, to whom they read their weekly effusions at their respective "houses of call" the evening before publication. Gradually the fire of bitterness began to pale, and the excitement of friends to die out; M'Quirter presently put forth a signal of distress. To accommodate "a large and influential number of its subscribers and patrons," he determined to publish on a Tuesday instead of on a Saturday as heretofore, whereupon Mr. Grimes, who had never been able to fill a single sheet properly, now doubled his paper, lowered his charge for advertisements, and hinted at his intention of publishing an occasional supplement.

However exciting it may be for a time, parties soon tire of carrying on a losing game for the mere sake of abusing each other, and Æneas M'Quirter not being behind the generality of his countrymen in "canniness" and shrewdness of intellect, came to the conclusion that it was no use doing so in this case, especially as the few remaining friends who still applauded, would be very sorry to subscribe anything towards his losses. He therefore very quietly negotiated the sale of his paper to the rival editor, and having concluded a satisfactory bargain, he placed the bulk of his property in the poke of his plaid, and walked out of Swillingford just as if bent on taking the air, leaving Mr. Grimes in undisputed possession of both papers, who forthwith commenced leading both Whig and Tory mind, the one on the Tuesday, the other on the Saturday.

The pot and pipe companions of course saw how things were, but the majority of the readers living in the country, just continued to pin their faith to the printed declarations of their oracles, while Grimes kept up the delusion of sincerity by every now and then fulminating a tremendous denunciation against his trimming, vacillating, inconsistent opponent on the Tuesday, and then retaliating with equal vigour upon himself on the Saturday. He wrote his own "leaders," both Whig and Tory, the arguments of one side pointing out answers for the other.

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Sometimes he led the way for a triumphant refutation, while the general tone of the articles was quite of the "upset a ministry" style. Indeed, Grimes strutted and swaggered as if the fate of the nation rested with him.

The papers themselves were not very flourishing-looking concerns, the wide-spread paragraphs, the staring type, the catching advertisements, forming a curious contrast to the close packing of the *Times*. The "Gutta Percha Company," "Locock's Female Pills," "Keating's Cough Lozenges," and the "Triumphs of Medicine," all with staring woodcuts and royal arms, occupied conspicuous places in every paper. A new advertisement was a novelty. However, the two papers answered a great deal better than either did singly, and any lack of matter was easily supplied from the magazines and new books. In this department, indeed, in the department of elegant light literature generally, Mr. Grimes was ably assisted by his eldest daughter, Lucy,—a young lady of a certain age—say liberal thirty—an ardent Bloomer—with a considerable taste for sentimental poetry, with which she generally filled the poet's corner. This assistance enabled Grimes to look after his auctioneering, bleaching, and paper-hanging concerns; and it so happened, that when the foregoing run arrived at the office he, having seen the next paper ready for press, had gone to Mr. Vosper's, some ten miles off, to paper his drawing-room, consequently the duties of deciding upon its publication devolved on the Bloomer. Now she was a most refined, puritanical young woman, full of sentiment and elegance, with a strong objection to what she considered the inhumanities of the chase. At first she was for rejecting the article altogether, and had it been a run with the Tinglebury harriers, or even, we believe, with Lord Scamperdale's hounds, she would have consigned it to the "Baalám box," but seeing it was with Mr. Puffington's hounds, whose house they had papered, and who advertised with them, she condescended to read it; and though her delicacy was shocked at encountering the word "stunning" at the outset, and also at the term "ravishing scent" further on, she nevertheless sent the manuscript to the compositors, after



MISS GRIMES GIVING THE "CORRECTED" COPY TO THE PRINTER.

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making such alterations and corrections as she thought would fit it for eyes polite. The consequence was, that the article appeared in the following form, though whether all the absurdities were owing to Miss Lucy's corrections, or the carelessness of the writer, or the printers had anything to do with it, we are not able to say. The errors, some of them arising from the mere alteration or substitution of a letter, will strike a sporting, more than a general reader. Thus it appeared in the middle of the third sheet of the *Swillingford Patriot* :—

SPLENDID RUN WITH MR. PUFFINGTON'S HOUNDS.

“This splendid pack had a superb run from Hollyburn Hanger, the property of its truly popular and sporting owner, Mr. Puffington. A splendid field of well-appointed sportsmen, among whom we recognised several distinguished strangers, and members of Lord Scamperdale's hunt, were present. After partaking of the well-known profuse and splendid hospitality of Hanby House, they proceeded at once to Hollyburn Hanger, where a fine seasonal fox, though some said he was a bay one, broke away in view of the whole pack, every hound scorning to cry, and making the welkin ring with their melody. He broke at the lower end of the cover, and crossing the brook, made straight for Fleecyhaugh Water-Meadows, over which there is always an exquisite perfume ; from there he made a slight bend, as if inclining for the plantations at Winstead, but changing his mind, he faced the rising ground, and crossing over nearly the highest point of Shillington Hill, made direct for the little village of Berrington Roothings below. Here the hounds came to a check, but Mr. Bragg, who had ridden gallantly on his favourite bay, as fine an animal as ever went, though somewhat past work of mouth, was well up with his hounds, and with a ‘gentle rantipole!’ and a single wave of his arm, proceeded to make one of those scientific rests for which this eminent huntsman is so justly celebrated. Hitting off the scent like a coachman, they went away again at score, and passing by Moorlinch Farm-buildings, and threading the strip of plantation

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by Bexley Burn, he crossed Silverbury Green, leaving Longford Hutch to the right, and passing straight on by the gibbet at Harpen. Here, then, the gallant pack, breaking from scent to view, ran into their box in the open close upon Mountnessing Wood, evidently his point from the first, and into which a few more strides would have carried him. It was as fine a run as ever was seen, and the grunting of the hounds was the admiration of all who heard it. The distance could not have been less than ten miles as a cow goes. The justly popular owner of this most celebrated pack, though riding good fourteen stones, led the Walters on his famous chestnut horse Tappey Lappey. After this truly brilliant affair, Mr. Puffington, like a thorough sportsman, and one who never thrashes his hounds unnecessarily—unlike some masters who never know when to leave off—returned to Hanby House, where a distinguished party of noblemen and gentlemen partook of his splendid hospitality.”

And the considerate Bloomer added of her own accord, “We hope we shall have to record many such runs in the imperishable columns of our paper.”

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CHAPTER XLII.

A DINNER AND A DEAL.



NOTHER grand dinner, on a more extensive scale than its predecessor, marked the day of this glorious run.

"There's goin' to be a great blow out," observed Mr. Spraggon to Mr. Sponge, as, crossing his hands and resting them on the crown of his head, he threw himself back in his easy-chair, to recruit after the exertion of concocting the description of the run.

"How d'ye know?" asked Sponge.

"Saw by the dinner table as we passed," replied Jack; adding, "it reaches nearly to the door."

"Indeed," said Sponge; "I wonder who's coming?"

"Most likely Guano, again; indeed, I know he is, for I asked his groom if he was going home, and he said no; and Lumpleg, you may be sure, and possibly old Blossomnose, Slapp, and, very likely, young Pacey."

"Are they chaps with any 'go' in them?—shake their elbows, or anything of that sort?" asked Sponge, working away as if he had the dice-box in his hand.

"I hardly know," replied Jack, thoughtfully. "I hardly know. Young Pacey, I think, might be made summut on; but his uncle, Major Screw, looks uncommon sharp arter him, and he's a minor."

"Would he *pay*?" asked Sponge, who, keeping as he said, "no books," was not inclined to do business on "tick."

"Don't know," replied Jack, squinting at half-cock; "don't

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know—would depend a good deal, I should say, upon how it was done. It's a deuced unhandsome world this. If one wins a trifle of a youngster at cards, let it be ever so openly done, it's sure to say one's cheated him, just because one happens to be a little older, as if age had anything to do with making the cards come right."

"It's an ungenerous world," observed Sponge, "and it's no use being abused for nothing. What sort of a genius is Pacey? Is he inclined to go the pace?"

"Oh, quite," replied Jack; "his great desire is to be thought a sportsman."

"A sportsman, or a sporting man?" asked Sponge.

"W-h-o-y! I should say p'raps a sportin' man more than the sportsman," replied Jack. "He's a great lumberin' lad, buttons his great stomach into a Newmarket cut-a-way, and carries a betting-book in his breast pocket."

"Oh, he's a bettor, is he!" exclaimed Sponge, brightening up.

"He's a raw poult of a chap," replied Jack; "just ready for anything—in a small way, at least—a chap that's always offering two to one in half-crowns. He'll have money, though, and can't be far off age. His father was a great spectacle-maker. You have heard of Pacey's spectacles?"

"Can't say as how I have," replied Sponge; adding, "they are more in your line than mine."

The further consideration of the youth was interrupted by the entrance of a footman with hot water, who announced that dinner would be ready in half an hour.

"Who's there comin'?" asked Jack.

"Don't know 'xactly, sir," replied the man; "believe much the same party as yesterday, with the addition of Mr. Pacey; Mr. Miller, of Newton; Mr. Fogo, of Bellevue; Mr. Brown, of the Hill; and some others, whose names I forget."

"Is Major Screw coming?" asked Sponge.

"I rayther think not, sir. I think I heard Mr. Plummey, the butler, say he declined."

"So much the better," growled Jack, throwing off his purple-

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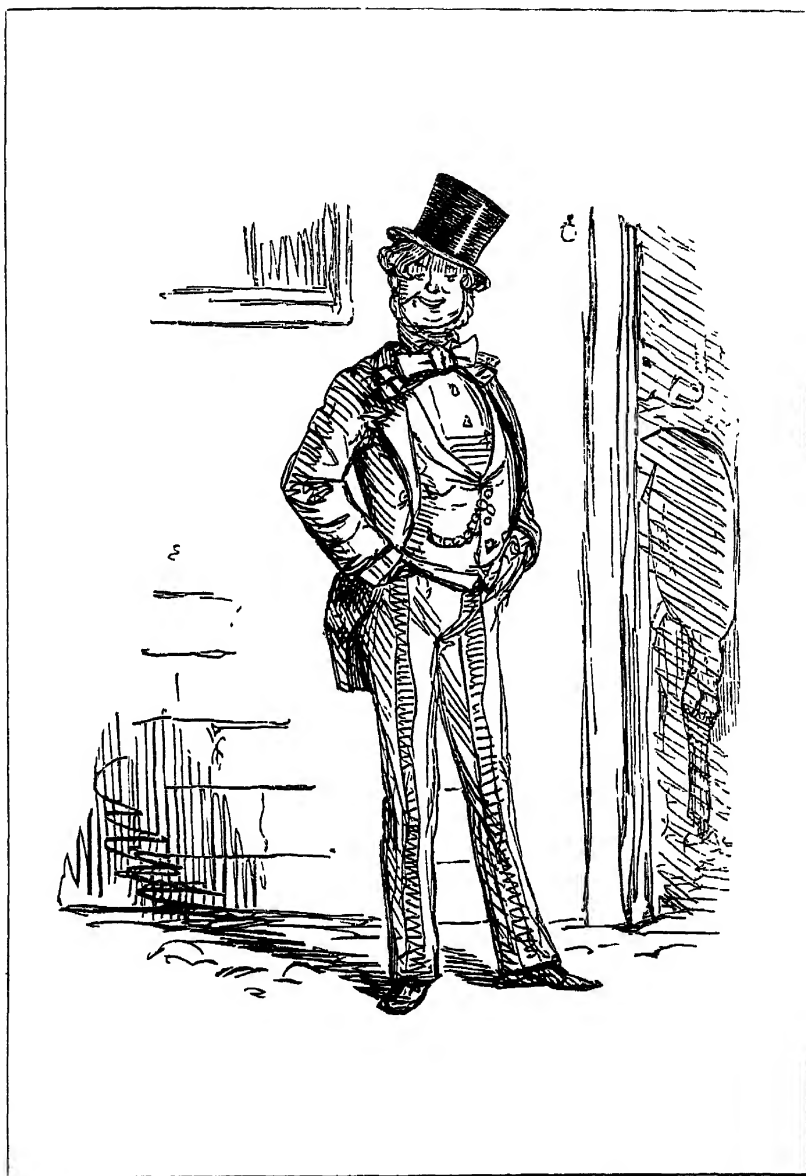
lapped coat in commencement of his toilette. As the two dressed they discussed the point how Pacey might be done.

When our friends got down stairs it was evident there was a great spread. Two red-plushed footmen stood on guard in the entrance, helping the arriviers out of their wraps, while a buzz of conversation sounded through the partially-opened drawing-room door, as Mr. Plummey stood, handle in hand, to announce the names of the guests. Our friends, having the *entrée*, of course passed in as at home, and mingled with the comers and stayers. Guest after guest quickly followed, almost all making the same observation, namely, that it was a fine day for the time of year, and then each sidled off, rubbing his hands, to the fire. Captain Guano monopolised about one half of it, like a Colossus of Rhodes, with a coat-lap under each arm. He seemed to think that, being a stayer, he had more right to the fire than the mere diners.

Mr. Puffington moved briskly among the motley throng, now expatiating on the splendour of the run, now hoping a friend was hungry, asking a third after his wife, and apologising to a fourth for not having called on his sister. Still his real thoughts were in the kitchen, and he kept counting noses and looking anxiously at the time-piece. After the door had had a longer rest than usual, Blossomnose at last cast up: "Now we're all here, surely!" thought he counting about; "one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, thirteen, fourteen, myself fifteen, fifteen, fifteen, must be another, sixteen, eight couple asked. Oh, that Pacey's wanting; always comes late, won't wait"—so saying, or rather thinking, Mr. Puffington rang the bell and ordered dinner. Pacey then cast up.

He was just the sort of swaggering youth that Jack had described; a youth who thought money would do everything in the world—make him a gentleman, in short. He came rolling into the room, grinning as if he had done something fine in being late. He had both his great red hands in his tight trouser pockets, and drew the right one out to favour his friends with it "all hot."

"I'm late, I guess," said he, grinning round at the assembled



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guests, now dispersed in the various attitudes of expectant eaters, some standing ready for a start, some half sitting on tables and sofa ends, others resigning themselves complacently to their chairs, abusing Mr. Pacey and all dinner delayers.

"I'm late, I guess," repeated he, as he now got navigated up to his host and held out his hand.

"O never mind," replied Puffington, accepting as little of the proffered paw as he could; "never mind," repeated he, adding, as he looked at the French clock on the mantel-piece now chiming a quarter past six, "I dare say I told you we dined at half-past five."

"Dare say you did, old boy," replied Pacey, kicking out his legs, and giving Puffington what he meant for a friendly poke in the stomach, but which in reality nearly knocked his wind out; "dare say you did, old boy, but so you did last time, if you remember, and deuce a bite did I get before six; so I thought I'd be quits with you this—he—he—he—haw—haw—haw," grinning and staring about as if he had done something very clever.

Pacey was one of those deplorable beings—a country swell. Tomkins and Hopkins, the haberdashers of Swillingford, never exhibited an ugly, out-of-the-way neckcloth or waistcoat with the words "patronised by the Prince," "very fashionable," or "quite the go," upon them, but he immediately adorned himself in one. On the present occasion he was attired in a wide-stretching, lace-tipped, black Joinville, with recumbent gills, showing the heavy amplitude of his enormous jaws, while the extreme scooping out of a collarless, flashy-buttoned, chain-daubed, black silk waistcoat, with broad blue stripes, afforded an uninterrupted view of a costly embroidered shirt, the view extending, indeed, up to a portion of his white satin "forget-me-not" embroidered braces. His coat was a broad-sterned, brass-buttoned blue, with pockets outside, and of course he wore a pair of creaking highly varnished boots. He was, apparently, about twenty; just about the age when a youth thinks it fine to associate with men, and an age at which some men are not above taking advantage of a youth. Perhaps he

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looked rather older than he was, for he was stiff built and strong, with an ample crop of whiskers, extending from his great red docken ears round his harvest moon of a face. He was lumpy, and clumsy, and heavy all over. Having now got inducted, he began to stare round the party, and first addressed our worthy friend Mr. Spraggon.

"Well, Sprag, how are you?" asked he.

"Well, Spec's" (alluding to his father's trade), "how are you?" replied Jack, with a growl, to the evident satisfaction of the party, who seemed to regard Pacey as the common enemy.

Fortunately just at the moment Mr. Plummey restored harmony by announcing dinner; and after the usual backing and retiring of mock modesty, Mr. Puffington said he would "show them the way," when there was as great a rush to get in, to avoid the bugbear of sitting with their backs to the fire, as there had been apparent disposition not to go at all. Notwithstanding the unfavourable aspect of affairs, Mr. Spraggon placed himself next Mr. Pacey, who sat a good way down the table, while Mr. Sponge occupied the post of honour by our host.

In accordance with the usual tactics of these sort of gentlemen, Spraggon and Sponge essayed to be two—if not exactly strangers, at all events gentlemen with very little acquaintance. Spraggon took advantage of a dead silence to call up the table to *Mister* Sponge to take wine; a compliment that Sponge acknowledged the accordance of by a very low bow into his plate, and by-and-by *Mister* Sponge "*Mistered*" Mr. Spraggon to return the compliment.

"Do you know much of that—that—that—*chap*?" (he would have said snob if he'd thought it would be safe), asked Pacey, as Sponge returned to still life after the first wine ceremony.

"No," replied Spraggon, "nor do I wish."

"Great snob," observed Pacey.

"Shocking," assented Spraggon.

"He's got a good horse or two, though," observed Pacey; "I saw them on the road coming here the other day." Pacey, like many youngsters, professed to be a judge of horses, and thought himself rather sharp at a deal.

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"They are *good* horses," replied Jack, with an emphasis on the good; adding, "I'd be very glad to have one of them."

Mr. Spraggon then asked Mr. Pacey to take champagne, as the commencement of a better understanding.

The wine flowed freely, and the guests, particularly the fresh infusion, did ample justice to it. The guests of the day before, having indulged somewhat freely, were more moderate at first, though they seemed well inclined to do their best after they got their stomachs a little restored. Spraggon could drink any given quantity at any time.

The conversation got brisker and brisker; and before the cloth was drawn there was a very general clamour, in which all sorts of subjects seemed to be mixed,—each man addressing himself to his immediate neighbour; one talking of taxes,—another of tares,—a third, of hunting and the system of kennel,—a fourth, of the corn-laws,—old Blossomnose, about tithes,—Slapp, about timber and water-jumping,—Miller, about Collison's pills; and Guano, about anything that he could get a word edged in about. Great, indeed, was the hubbub. Gradually, however, as the evening advanced Pacey and Guano out-talked the rest, and at length Pacey got the noise pretty well to himself. When anything definite could be extracted from the mass of confusion, he was expatiating on steeple-chasing, hurdle-racing, weights for age, ons and offs clever—a sort of mixture of hunting, racing, and "Alken."

Sponge cocked his ear, and sat on the watch, occasionally hazarding an observation, while Jack, who was next Pacey, on the left, pretended to decry Sponge's judgment, asking *sotto voce*, with a whiff through his nose, what such a cockney as that could know about horses? What between Jack's encouragement, and the inspiring influence of the bottle, aided by his own self-sufficiency, Pacey began to look upon Sponge with anything but admiration; and at last it occurred to him that he would be a very proper subject to, what he called, "take the shine out of."

"That isn't a bad-like nag, that chestnut of yours, for the wheeler of a coach, Mr. Sponge," exclaimed he, at the

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instigation of Spraggon, to our friend, producing, of course, a loud guffaw from the party.

"No, he isn't," replied Sponge, coolly; adding, "very like one, I should say."

"Devilish *good* horse," growled Jack in Pacey's ear.

"Oh, I dare say," whispered Pacey, pretending to be scraping up the orange syrup in his plate; adding, "I'm only chaffing the beggar."

"He looks solitary without the coach at his tail," continued Pacey, looking up, and again addressing Sponge up the table.

"*He does*," affirmed Sponge, amidst the laughter of the party.

Pacey didn't know how to take this; whether as a "sell" or a compliment to his own wit. He sat for a few seconds grinning and staring like a fool; at last, after gulping down a bumper of claret, he again fixed his unmeaning green eyes upon Sponge, and exclaimed:

"I'll challenge your horse, Mr. Sponge."

A burst of applause followed the announcement; for it was evident that amusement was in store.

"You'll *w-h-a-w-t*?" replied Sponge, staring, and pretending ignorance.

"I'll challenge your horse," repeated Pacey with confidence, and in a tone that stopped the lingering murmur of conversation and fixed the attention of the company on himself.

"I don't understand you," replied Sponge, pretending astonishment.

"Lor bless us! why, where have you lived all your life?" asked Pacey.

"Oh, partly in one place, and partly in another," was the answer.

"I should think so," replied Pacey, with a look of compassion; adding, in an under tone, "a good deal with your mother, I should think."

"If you could get that horse at a moderate figure," whispered Jack to his neighbour, and squinting his eyes inside out as he spoke, "he's well worth having."

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"The beggar won't sell him," muttered Pacey, who was fonder of talking about buying horses than of buying them.

"Oh yes, he will," replied Jack; "he didn't understand what you meant. Mr. Sponge," said he, addressing himself slowly and distinctly up the table to our hero—"Mr. Sponge, my friend Mr. Pacey here challenges your chestnut."

Sponge still stared in well-feigned astonishment.

"It's a custom we have in this country," continued Jack, looking, as he thought, at Sponge, but, in reality, squinting most frightfully at the sideboard.

"Do you mean he wants to buy him?" asked Sponge.

"Yes," replied Jack, confidently.

"No, I *don't*," whispered Pacey, giving Jack a kick under the table. Pacey had not yet drunk sufficient wine to be rash.

"Yes, yes," replied Jack, tartly, "*you do*;" adding, in an under tone, "leave it to me, man, and I'll let you in for a good thing. Yes, Mr. Sponge," continued he, addressing himself to our hero, "Mr. Pacey fancies the chestnut, and challenges him."

"Why doesn't he ask the price?" replied Sponge, who was always ready for a deal.

"Ah, the price must be left to a third party," said Jack. "The principle of the thing is this," continued he, enlisting the aid of his fingers to illustrate his position: "Mr. Pacey, here," said he, applying the forefinger of his right hand to the thumb of the left, looking earnestly at Sponge, but in reality squinting up at the chandelier—"Mr. Pacey here challenges your horse Multum-in-somethin'—I forget what you said you call him—but the nag I rode to-day. Well, then," continued Jack, "you" (demonstrating Sponge by pressing his two fore-fingers together, and holding them erect) "accept the challenge, but can challenge anything Mr. Pacey has—a horse, dog, gun—anything; and, having fixed on somethin', then a third party" (who Jack represented by cocking up his thumb), "any one you like to name, makes the award. Well, having agreed upon that party" (Jack still cocking up the thumb to represent the arbitrator), "he says, 'Give me money.' The two then put, say half-a-crown or five shillin's each, into his hand, to which

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the arbitrator adds the same sum for himself. That being done, the arbitrator says, 'Hands in pockets, gen'lemen'" (Jack diving his right hand up to the hilt in his own). "If this be an award, Mr. Pacey's horse gives Mr. Sponge's horse so much—*draw*." (Jack suiting the action to the word, and laying his fist on the table.) "If each person's hand contains money, it is an award—it is a deal; and the arbitrator gets the half-crowns, or whatever it is, for his trouble; so that, in course, he has a direct interest in makin' such an award as will lead to a deal. *Now* do you understand?" continued Jack, addressing himself earnestly to Sponge.

"I think I do," replied Sponge, who had been at the game pretty often.

"Well, then," continued Jack, reverting to his original position, "my friend, Mr. Pacey here, challenges your chestnut."

"No, *never mind*," muttered Pacey, peevishly, in an under tone, with a frown on his face, giving Jack a dig in the ribs with his elbow. "Never mind," repeated he; "*I* don't care about it—I don't want the horse."

"But *I* do," growled Jack; adding, in an under tone also, as he stooped for his napkin, "*don't spoil sport, man*; he's as good a horse as ever stepped; and if you'll challenge him, I'll stand between you and danger."

"But he may challenge something I don't want to part with," observed Pacey.

"Then you've nothin' to do," replied Jack, "but bring up your hand without any money in it."

"Ah! I forgot," replied Pacey, who did not like not to appear what he called "fly." "Well, then, I challenge your chestnut!" exclaimed he, perking up, and shouting up the table to Sponge.

"Good!" replied our friend. "I challenge your watch and chain, then," looking at Pacey's chain-daubed vest.

"Name *me* arbitrator," muttered Jack, as he again stooped for his napkin.

"Who shall handicap us? Captain Guano, Mr. Lumpleg, or who?" asked Sponge.

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"Suppose we say Spraggon?—he says he rode the horse to-day," replied Pacey.

"Quite agreeable," said Sponge.

"Now, Jack!" "Now, Spraggon!" "Now, old Solomon!" "Now, Doctor Wiseman," resounded from different parts of the table.

Jack looked solemn; and diving both hands into his breeches' pockets, stuck out his legs extensively before him.

"Give me money," said he, pompously. They each handed him half-a-crown; and Jack added a third for himself. "Mr. Pacey challenges Mr. Sponge's chestnut horse, and Mr. Sponge challenges Mr. Pacey's gold watch," observed Jack, sententiously.

"Come, old Slowman, go on!" exclaimed Guano; adding, "have you got no further than that?"

"Hurry no man's cattle," replied Jack, tartly; adding, "you may keep a donkey yourself some day."

"Mr. Pacey challenges Mr. Sponge's chestnut horse," repeated Jack. "How old is the chestnut, Mr. Sponge?" added he, addressing himself to our friend.

"Upon my word I hardly know," replied Sponge, "he's past mark of mouth; but I think a hunter's age has very little to do with his worth."

"Who-y, that depends," rejoined Jack, blowing out his cheeks, and looking as pompous as possible—"that depends a good deal upon how he's been used in his youth."

"He's about nine, I should say," observed Sponge, pretending to have been calculating, though, in reality, he knew nothing whatever about the horse's age. "Say nine, or rising ten, and never did a day's work till he was six."

"Indeed!" said Jack, with an important bow; adding, "being easy with them at the beginnin' puts on a deal to the end. Perfect hunter, I s'pose?"

"Why you can judge of that yourself," replied Sponge.

"Perfect hunter, *I* should say," rejoined Jack, "and steady at his fences—don't know that I ever rode a better fencer. Well," continued he, having apparently pondered all that over

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in his mind, "I must trouble you to let me look at your ticker," said he, turning short round on his neighbour.

"There," said Mr. Pacey, producing a fine flash watch from his waistcoat-pocket, and holding it to Jack.

"The chain's included in the challenge, mind," observed Sponge.

"In course," said Jack; "it's what the pawnbrokers call a watch with its appurts." (Jack had his watch at his uncle's, and knew the terms exactly.)

"It's a repeater, mind," observed Pacey, taking off the chain.

"The chain's heavy," said Jack, running it up in his hand; "and here's a pistol-key and a beautiful pencil-case, with the Pacey crest and motto," observed Jack, trying to decipher the latter. "If it had been without the words, whatever they are," said he, giving up the attempt, "it would have been worth more, but the gold's fine, and a new stone can easily be put in."

He then pulled an old hunting-card out of his pocket, and proceeded to make sundry calculations and estimates in pencil on the back.

"Well now," said he, at length, looking up, "I should say, such a watch as that and appurts," holding them up, "couldn't be bought in a shop under eight-and-twenty pund."

"It cost five-and-thirty," observed Mr. Pacey.

"Did it!" rejoined Jack; adding, "then you were done."

Jack then proceeded to do a little more arithmetic, during which process Mr. Puffington passed the wine and gave as a toast—"Success to the handicap."

"Well," at length said Jack, having apparently struck a balance, "hands in pocket, gen'lemen. If this is an award, Mr. Pacey's gold watch and appurts gives Mr. Sponge's chestnut horse seventy golden sovereigns. *Show money*," whispered Jack to Pacey, adding, "I'll stand the shot."

"Stop!" roared Guano, "do either of you sport your hand?"

"Yes, I do," replied Mr. Pacey, coolly.

"And I," said Mr. Sponge.

"Hold hard, then, gen'lemen!" roared Jack, getting excited, and beginning to foam. "Hold hard, gen'lemen!" repeated

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he, just as he was in the habit of roaring at the troublesome customers in Lord Scamperdale's field; "Mr. Pacey and Mr. Sponge both sport their hands."

"I'll lay a guinea Pacey doesn't hold money," exclaimed Guano.

"Done!" exclaimed Parson Blossomnose.

"I'll bet it does," observed Charley Slapp.

"I'll take you," replied Mr. Miller.

Then the hubbub of betting commenced, and raged with fury for a short time; some betting sovereigns, some half-sovereigns, others half-crowns and shillings, as to whether the hands of one or both held money.

Givers and takers being at length accommodated, perfect silence reigned, and all eyes turned upon the doubled fists of the respective champions.

Jack having adjusted his great tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles, and put on a most consequential air, inquired, like a gambling-house keeper, if they were "All done"—had all "made their game?" And "Yes! yes! yes!" resounded from all quarters.

"Then, gen'lemen," said Jack, addressing Pacey and Sponge, who still kept their closed hands on the table—"show!"

At the word, their hands opened, and each held money.

"A deal! a deal! a deal!" resounded through the room, accompanied with clapping of hands, thumping of the table, and dancing of glasses. "You owe me a guinea," exclaimed one. "I want half a sovereign of you," roared another. "Here's my half-crown," said a third, handing one across the table to the fortunate winner. A general settlement took place, in the midst of which the "watch and appurts" were handed to Mr. Sponge.

"We'll drink Mr. Pacey's health," said Mr. Puffington, helping himself to a bumper, and passing the lately replenished decanters. "He's done the thing like a sportsman, and deserves to have luck with his deal. Your good health, Mr. Pacey!" continued he, addressing himself specifically to our friend, "and luck to your horse."

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"Your good health, Mr. Pacey—your good health, Mr. Pacey—your good health, Mr. Pacey," then followed in the various intonations that mark the feelings of the speaker towards the *toastee*, as the bottles passed round the table.

The excitement seemed to have given fresh zest to the wine, and those who had been shirking, or filling on heel-taps, now began filling bumpers, while those who always filled bumpers now took back hands.

There is something about horse-dealing that seems to interest every one. Conversation took a brisk turn, and nothing but the darkness of the night prevented their having the horse out and trying him. Pacey wanted him brought into the dining-room, *à la* Briggs, but Puff wouldn't stand that. The transfer seemed to have invested the animal with supernatural charms, and those who in general cared nothing about horses wanted to have a sight of him.

Toasting having commenced, as usual, it was proceeded with. Sponge's health followed that of Mr. Pacey's, Mr. Puffington availing himself of the opportunity afforded by proposing it, of expressing the gratification it afforded himself and all true sportsmen to see so distinguished a character in the country; and he concluded by hoping that the diminution of his stud would not interfere with the length of his visit—a toast that was drunk with great applause.

Mr. Sponge replied by saying, "That he certainly had not intended parting with his horse, though one more or less was neither here nor there, especially in these railway times, when a man had nothing to do but take a half-guinea's worth of electric wire, and have another horse in less than no time; but Mr. Pacey having taken a fancy to the horse, he had been more accommodating to him than he had to his friend, Mr. Spraggon, if he would allow him to call him so (Jack squinted and bowed assent), who," continued Mr. Sponge, "had in vain attempted that morning to get him to put a price upon him."

"*Very true*," whispered Jack to Pacey, with a feel of the elbow in his ribs; adding, in an under tone, "the beggar doesn't think I've got him in spite of him, though."

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"The horse," Mr. Sponge continued, "was an undeniable good 'un, and he wished Mr. Pacey joy of his bargain."

This venture having been so successful, others attempted similar means, appointing Mr. Spraggon the arbitrator. Captain Guano challenged Mr. Fogo's phaeton, while Mr. Fogo retaliated upon the captain's chestnut horse; but the captain did not hold money to the award. Blossomnose challenged Mr. Miller's pig; but the latter could not be induced to claim anything of the worthy rector's for Mr. Spraggon to exercise his appraising talents upon. After an evening of much noise and confusion, the wine-heated party at last broke up—the staying company retiring to their couches, and the outlying ones finding their ways home as best they could.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MORNING'S REFLECTIONS.



WHEN young Pacey awoke in the morning he had a very bad headache, and his temples throbbed as if the veins would burst their bounds. The first thing that recalled the actual position of affairs to his mind was feeling under the pillow for his watch—a fruitless search, that ended in recalling something of the over-night's proceedings.

Pacey liked a cheap flash, and when elated with wine might be betrayed into indiscretions that his soberer moments were proof against. Indeed, among youths of his own age he was reckoned rather a sharp hand; and it was the vanity of associating with men, and wishing to appear a match for them, that occasionally brought him into trouble. In a general way, he was a very cautious hand.

He now lay tumbling and tossing about in bed, and little by little he laid together the outline of the evening's proceedings, beginning with his challenging Mr. Sponge's chestnut, and ending with the resignation of his watch and chain. He thought he was wrong to do anything of the sort. He didn't want the horse, not he. What should he do with him? he had one more than he wanted, as it was. Then, paying for him seventy sovereigns! confound it, it would be very inconvenient—*most* inconvenient—indeed, he couldn't do it, so there was an end of it. The facilities of carrying out after-dinner transactions frequently vanish with the morning's sun. So it was with Mr. Pacey. Then he began to think how to get out of it. Should

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he tell Mr. Sponge candidly the state of his finances, and trust to his generosity for letting him off? Was Mr. Sponge a likely man to do it? He thought he was. But then, would he blab? He thought he would, and that would blow him among those by whom he wished to be thought knowing, a man not to be done. Altogether he was very much perplexed; seventy pounds was a vast of money; and then there was his watch gone, too! a hundred and more altogether. He must have been drunk to do it—*very* drunk, he should say; and then he began to think whether he had not better treat it as an after-dinner frolic, and pretend to forget all about it. That seemed feasible.

All at once it occurred to Pacey that Mr. Spraggon was the purchaser, and that he was only a middle-man. His headache forsook him for the moment, and he felt a new man. It was clearly the case, and bit by bit he recollected all about it. How Jack had told him to challenge the horse, and he would stand to the bargain; how he had whispered him (Pacey) to name him (Jack) arbitrator; and how he had done so, and Jack had made the award. Then he began to think that the horse must be a good one, as Jack would not set too high a price on him, seeing that he was the purchaser. Then he wondered that he had put enough on to induce Sponge to sell him: that rather puzzled him. He lay a long time tossing, and proing and coning, without being able to arrive at any satisfactory solution of the matter. At last he rang his bell, and finding it was eight o'clock he got up, and proceeded to dress himself; which operation being accomplished, he sought Jack's room, to have a little confidential conversation with him on the subject, and arrange about paying Sponge for the horse, without letting out who was the purchaser.

Jack was snoring, with his great mouth wide open, and his grizzly head enveloped in a white cotton nightcap. The noise of Pacey entering awoke him.

"Well, old boy," growled he, turning over as soon as he saw who it was, "what are you up to?"

"Oh, nothing particular," replied Mr. Pacey, in a careless sort of tone.

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"Then make yourself scarce, or I'll baptise you in a way you won't like," growled Jack, diving under the bedclothes.

"Oh, why I just wanted to have—have half-a-dozen words with you about our last night's" (*ha—hem—haw!*) "handicap, you know—about the horse, you know."

"About the *w-h-a-w-t?*" drawled Jack, as if perfectly ignorant of what Pacey was talking about.

"About the horse, you know—about Mr. Sponge's horse, you know—that you got me to challenge for you, you know," stammered Pacey.

"Oh, dash it, the chap's drunk," growled Jack aloud to himself; adding to Pacey, "you shouldn't get up so soon, man—sleep the drink off."

Pacey stood nonplussed.

"Don't you remember, Mr. Spraggon," at last asked he, after watching the tassel of Jack's cap peeping above the bedclothes, "what took place last night, you know? You asked me to get you Mr. Sponge's chestnut, and you know I did, you know."

"Hout, lad, *disperse!*—get out of this!" exclaimed Jack, starting his great red face above the bedclothes, and squinting frightfully at Pacey.

"Well, my dear friend, but you did," observed Pacey, soothingly.

"*Nonsense!*" roared Jack, again ducking under.

Pacey stood agape.

"Come!" exclaimed Jack, again starting up, "cut your stick!—be off!—make yourself scarce!—give your rags a gallop, in short!—don't be after disturbin' a gen'leman of fortin's rest in this way."

"But, my dear Mr. Spraggon," resumed Pacey, in the same gentle tone, "you surely forget what you asked me to do."

"*I do,*" replied Jack, firmly.

"Well, but, my dear Mr. Spraggon, if you'll have the kindness to recollect—to consider—to reflect on what passed, you'll surely remember commissioning me to challenge Mr. Sponge's horse for you?"

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"*Me!*" exclaimed Jack, bouncing up in bed, and sitting squinting furiously. "*Me!*" repeated he; "*impossible*. How could *I* do such a thing? Why, I handicap'd him, man, for you, man."

"You told me, for all that," replied Mr. Pacey, with a jerk of the head.

"Oh, by Jove!" exclaimed Jack, taking his cap by the tassel, and twisting it off his head, "that won't do!—*downright* impeachment of one's integrity. Oh, by Jingo! that won't do!" motioning as if he was going to bounce out of bed; "can't stand that—impeach one's integrity, you know, better take one's life, you know. Life without honour's nothin', you know. Cock pheasant at Weybridge, six o'clock i' the mornin'!"

"Oh, I assure you, I didn't mean anything of that sort," exclaimed Mr. Pacey, frightened at Jack's vehemence, and the way in which he now foamed at the mouth and flourished his nightcap about. "Oh, I assure you, I didn't mean anything of that sort," repeated he, "only I thought p'raps you mightn't recollect all that had passed, p'raps; and if we were to talk matters quietly over, by putting that and that together, we might assist each other, and——"

"Oh, by Jove!" interrupted Jack, dashing his nightcap against the bedpost, "too late for anything of that sort, sir—*downright* impeachment of one's integrity, sir—must be settled another way, sir."

"But, I assure you, you mistake!" exclaimed Pacey.

"Rot your mistakes!" interrupted Jack; "there's no mistake in the matter. You've *reglarly* impeached my integrity—blood of the Spraggons won't stand that. '*Death before Dishonour!*'" shouted he, at the top of his voice, flourishing his nightcap over his head, and then dashing it on to the middle of the floor.

"What's the matter?—what's the matter?—what's the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, rushing through the connecting door. "What's the matter?" repeated he, placing himself between the bed in which Jack still sat upright, squinting his eyes inside out, and where Mr. Pacey stood.

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"Oh, Mr. Sponge!" exclaimed Jack, clasping his raised hands in thankfulness, "I'm so *glad* you're here!—I'm so thankful you're come! I've been insulted!—*oh, goodness*, how I've been insulted!" added he, throwing himself back in the bed, as if thoroughly overcome with his feelings.

"Well, but what's the matter?—what is it all about?" asked Sponge, coolly, having a pretty good guess what it was.

"Never was so insulted in my life!" ejaculated Jack, from under the bedclothes.

"Well, but what *is* it?" repeated Sponge, appealing to Pacey, who stood as pale as ashes.

"Oh! nothing," replied he; "*quite* a mistake; Mr. Spraggon misunderstood me altogether."

"Mistake! There's no mistake in the matter!" exclaimed Jack, appearing again on the surface like an otter; "you gave me the lie as plain as a pikestaff."

"*Indeed!*" observed Mr. Sponge, drawing in his breath and raising his eyebrows right up into the roof of his head. "Indeed!" repeated he.

"No; nothing of the sort, I assure you," asserted Mr. Pacey.

"Must have satisfaction!" exclaimed Jack, again diving under the bedclothes.

"Well, but let us hear how matters stand," said Mr. Sponge, coolly, as Jack's grizzly head disappeared.

"You'll be my second," growled Jack, from under the bedclothes.

"Oh! second be hanged," retorted Sponge. "You've nothing to fight about; Mr. Pacey says he didn't mean anything, that you misunderstood him, and what more can a man want?"

"Just so," replied Mr. Pacey—"just so. I assure you I never intended the slightest imputation on Mr. Spraggon."

"I'm sure not," replied Mr. Sponge.

"*H-u-m-p-h,*" grunted Jack from under the bedclothes, like a pig in the straw. Not showing any disposition to appear on the surface again, Mr. Sponge, after standing a second or two, gave a jerk of his head to Mr. Pacey, and forthwith conducted

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him into his own room, shutting the door between Mr. Spraggon and him.

Mr. Sponge then inquired into the matter, kindly sympathising with Mr. Pacey, who he was certain never meant anything disrespectful to Mr. Spraggon, who, Mr. Sponge thought, seemed rather quick at taking offence ; though, doubtless, as Mr. Sponge observed, "a man was perfectly right in being tenacious of his integrity," a position that he illustrated by a familiar passage from Shakspeare, about stealing a purse and stealing trash, &c.

Emboldened by his kindness, Mr. Pacey then got Mr. Sponge on to talk about the horse of which he had become the unwilling possessor—the renowned chestnut, Multum in Parvo.

Mr. Sponge spoke like a very prudent, conscientious man ; said that really it was difficult to give an opinion about a horse ; that what suited one man might not suit another—that *he* considered Multum in Parvo a very good horse ; indeed, that he wouldn't have parted with him if he hadn't more than he wanted, and the cream of the season had passed without his meeting with any of those casualties that rendered the retention of an extra horse or two desirable. Altogether, he gave Mr. Pacey to understand that he held him to his bargain. Having thanked Sponge for his great kindness, and got an order on the groom (Mr. Leather) to have the horse out, Mr. Pacey took his departure to the stable, and Sponge having summoned his neighbour Mr. Spraggon from his bed, the two proceeded to a passage window that commanded a view of the stable-yard.

Mr. Pacey presently went swaggering across it, cracking his jockey whip against his leg, followed by Mr. Leather, with a saddle on his shoulder and a bridle in his hand.

"He'd better keep his whip quiet," observed Mr. Sponge, with a shake of his head, as he watched Pacey's movements.

"The beggar thinks he can ride anything," observed Jack.

"He'll find his mistake out just now," replied Sponge.

Presently the stable-door opened, and the horse stepped slowly and quietly out, looking blooming and bright after his previous day's gallop. Pacey running his eyes over his clean



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muscular legs and finely-shaped form, thought he hadn't done so far amiss after all. Leather stood at the horse's head whistling and soothing him, feeling anything but the easy confidence that Mr. Pacey exhibited. Putting his whip under his arm, Pacey just walked up to the horse, and, placing the point of his foot in the stirrup, hoisted himself on by the mane, without deigning to take hold of the reins. Having soused himself into the saddle he then began feeling the stirrups.

"How are they for length, sir?" asked Leather, with a hitch of his hand to his forehead.

"They'll do," replied Pacey, in a tone of indifference, gathering up the reins, and applying his left heel to the horse's side, while he gave him a touch of the whip on the other. The horse gave a wince, and a hitch up behind, as much as to say, "If you do that again I'll kick in right earnest," and then walked quietly out of the yard.

"I took the fiery edge off him yesterday, I think," observed Jack, as he watched the horse's leisurely movements.

"Not so sure of that," replied Sponge; adding, as he left the passage-window, "he'll be trying him in the park; let's go and see him from my window."

Accordingly, our friends placed themselves at Sponge's bedroom window, and presently the clash of a gate announced that Sponge was right in his speculation. In another second the horse and rider appeared in sight,—the horse going much at his ease, but Mr. Pacey preparing himself for action. He began working the bridle and kicking his sides, to get him into a canter; an exertion that produced quite a contrary effect, for the animal slackened his pace as Pacey's efforts increased. When, however, he took his whip from under his arm, the horse darted right up into the air, and plunging down again, with one convulsive effort shot Mr. Pacey several yards over his head, knocking his head through his hat. The brute then began to graze, as if nothing particular had happened. This easy indifference, however, did not extend to the neighbourhood; for no sooner was Mr. Pacey floored than there was such a rush of grooms, and helpers, and footmen, and gardeners,

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—to say nothing of women,—from all parts of the grounds, as must have made it very agreeable to him to know how he had been watched. One picked him up,—another his hat-crown,—a third his whip,—a fourth his gloves,—while Margaret, the housemaid, rushed to the rescue with her private bottle of *sal volatile*,—and John, the under-butler, began to extricate him from the new-fashioned neckcloth he had made of his hat.

Though our friend was a good deal shaken by the fall, the injury to his body was trifling compared to that done to his mind. Being kicked off a horse was an indignity he had never calculated upon. Moreover, it was done in such a masterly manner as clearly showed it could be repeated at pleasure. In addition to which, everybody laughs at a man that is kicked off. All these considerations rushed to his mind, and made him determine not to brook the mirth of the guests as well as the servants.

Accordingly, he borrowed a hat and started off home, and seeking his guardian, Major Screw, confided to him the position of affairs. The Major, who was a man of the world, forthwith commenced a negotiation with Mr. Sponge, who, after a good deal of haggling, and not until the horse had shot the major over his head, too, at length, as a great favour, consented to take fifty pounds to rescind the bargain, accompanying his kindness by telling the major to advise his ward never to dabble in horseflesh after dinner; a piece of advice that we also very respectfully tender to our juvenile readers.

And Sponge shortly after sent Spraggon a five pound note as his share of the transaction.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

ANOTHER SICK HOST.



Mr. Puffington.

WHEN Mr. Puffington read Messrs. Sponge and Spraggon's account of the run with his hounds, in the Swillingford paper, he was perfectly horrified; words cannot describe the disgust that he felt. It came upon him quite by surprise, for he expected to be immortalised in some paper or work

of general circulation, in which the Lords Loosefish, Sir Toms, and Sir Harrys of former days might recognise the spirited doings of their early friend. He wanted the superiority of his establishment, the excellence of his horses, the stoutness of his hounds, and the polish of his field, proclaimed, with perhaps a quiet cut at the Flat-Hat gentry; instead of which he had a mixed medley sort of a mess, whose humdrum monotony was

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only relieved by the absurdities and errors with which it was crammed. At first, Mr. Puffington could not make out what it meant, whether it was a hoax for the purpose of turning run-writing into ridicule, or it had suffered mutilation at the hands of the printer. Calling a good scent an exquisite perfume looked suspicious of a hoax, but then seasonal fox for seasoned fox, scorning to cry for scoring to cry, bay fox for bag fox, grunting for hunting, thrashing for trashing, rests for casts, and other absurdities, looked more like accident than design.

These are the sort of errors that non-sporting compositors might easily make, one term being as much like English to them as the other, though amazingly different to the eye or the ear of a sportsman. Mr. Puffington was thoroughly disgusted. He was sick of hounds and horses, and Bragg, and hay and corn, and kennels and meal, and saddles and bridles; and now, this absurdity seemed to cap the whole thing. He was ill-prepared for such a shock. The exertion of successive dinner-giving—above all, of bachelor dinner-giving—and that too in the country, where men sit, talk, talk, talking, sip, sip, sipping, and “just another bottle-ing;” more, we believe, from want of something else to do than from any natural inclination to exceed; the exertion, we say, of such parties had completely unstrung our fat friend, and ill-prepared his nerves for such a shock. Being a great man for his little comforts, he always breakfasted in his dressing-room, which he had fitted up in the most luxurious style, and where he had his newspapers (most carefully ironed out) laid with his letters against he came in. It was late on the morning following our last chapter, ere he thought he had got rid of as much of his winy headache as fitful sleep would carry off, and enveloped himself in a blue and yellow-flowered silk dressing-gown and Turkish slippers. He looked at his letters, and knowing their outsides, left them for future perusal; and sousing himself into the depths of a many-cushioned easy-chair, proceeded to spell his *Morning Post*—Tattersall's advertisements—“Grosjean's Paletots”—“Mr. Albert Smith”—“Coals, best Stewart Hetton or Lambton's”—“Police Intelligence”—and such other light

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reading as does not require any great effort to connect or comprehend.

- Then came his breakfast, for which he had very little appetite, though he relished his coffee, and also an anchovy. While dawdling over these, he heard sundry wheels grinding about below the window, and the bumping and thumping of boxes, indicative of "goings away," for which he couldn't say he felt sorry. He couldn't even be at the trouble of getting up and going to the window to see who it was that was off, so weary and headachy was he. He rolled and lolled in his chair, now taking a sip of coffee, now a bite of anchovy toast, now considering whether he durst venture on an egg, and again having recourse to the *Post*. At last, having exhausted all the light reading in it, and scanned through the list of hunting appointments, he took up the Swillingford paper to see that they had got his "meets" right for the next week. How astonished he was to find the previous day's run staring him in the face, headed, "SPLENDID RUN WITH MR. PUFFINGTON'S HOUNDS," in the imposing type here displayed. "Well, that's quick work, however," said he, casting his eyes up to the ceiling in astonishment, and thinking how unlike it was the Swillingford papers, which were always a week, but generally a fortnight behindhand with information. "Splendid run with Mr. Puffington's hounds," read he again, wondering who had done it:—Bardolph, the innkeeper; Allsop, the cabinet-maker; Tuggins, the doctor, were all out; so was Weatherhog, the butcher. Which of them could it be? Grimes, the editor, wasn't there; indeed, he couldn't ride, and the country was not adapted for a gig.

He then began to read it, and the further he got the more he was disgusted. At last, when he came to the "seasonal fox, which some thought was a bay one," his indignation knew no bounds, and crumpling the paper up in a heap he threw it from him in disgust. Just then in came Plummey, the butler. Plummey saw at a glance what had happened; for Mr. Bragg, and the whips, and the grooms, and the helpers, and the feeder—the whole hunting establishment—were up in arms at the

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burlesque, and vowing vengeance against the author of it. Mr. Spraggon, on seeing what a mess had been made of his labours, availed himself of the offer of a seat in Captain Guano's dog-cart, and was clear of the premises; while Mr. Sponge determined to profit by Spraggon's absence, and lay the blame on him.

"Oh, Plummey!" exclaimed Mr. Puffington, as his servant entered, "I'm deuced unwell—quite knocked up, in short," clapping his hand on his forehead; adding, "I shall not be able to dine downstairs to-day."

"'Deed, sir," replied Mr. Plummey, in a tone of commiseration—" 'deed, sir; sorry to hear that, sir."

"Are they all gone?" asked Mr. Puffington, dropping his boiled gooseberry-looking eyes upon the fine-flowered carpet.

"All gone, sir—all gone," replied Mr. Plummey; "all except Mr. Sponge."

"Oh, he's still here!" replied Mr. Puffington, shuddering with disgust at the recollection of the newspaper run. "Is he going to-day?" asked he.

"No, sir—I dare say not, sir," replied Mr. Plummey. "His man—his groom—his—whatever he calls him, expects they'll be staying some time."

"The *deuce*!" exclaimed Mr. Puffington, whose hospitality, like Jawleyford's, was greater in imagination than in reality.

"Shall I take these things away?" asked Plummey, after a pause.

"Couldn't you manage to get him to go?" asked Mr. Puffington, still harping on his remaining guest.

"Don't know, sir. I could try, sir—believe he's bad to move, sir," replied Plummey, with a grin.

"Is he really?" replied Mr. Puffington, alarmed lest Sponge should fasten himself upon him for good.

"They say so," replied Mr. Plummey, "but I don't speak from any personal knowledge, for I know nothing of the man."

"Well," said Mr. Puffington, amused at his servant's exclusiveness, "I wish you would try to get rid of him, bow him out civilly, you know—say I'm unwell—very unwell—

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deuced unwell—ordered to keep quiet—say it as if from yourself, you know—it mus'n't appear as if it came from me, you know.”

“In course not,” replied Mr. Plummey, “in course not;” adding, “I’ll do my best, sir—I’ll do my best.” So saying, he took up the breakfast things and departed.

Mr. Sponge regaling himself with a cigar in the stables and shrubberies, it was some time before Mr. Plummey had an opportunity of trying his diplomacy upon him, it being contrary to Mr. Plummey’s custom to go out of doors after any one. At last he saw Sponge coming lounging along the terrace-walk, looking like a man thoroughly disengaged, and timing himself properly, encountered him in the entrance.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said Mr. Plummey, “but cook, sir, wishes to know, sir, if you dine here to-day, sir?”

“Of course,” replied Mr. Sponge, “where would you have me dine?”

“Oh, I didn’t know, sir—only Mr. Puffington, sir, is very poorly, sir, and I thought p'r'aps you'd be dining out.”

“Poorly is he?” replied Mr. Sponge; “sorry to hear that—what’s the matter with him?”

“Bad bilious attack, I think,” replied Plummey—“very subject to them, at this time of year particlrlarly; was laid up, at least confined to his room, three weeks last year of a similar attack.”

“Indeed!” replied Mr. Sponge, not relishing the information.

“Then I must say you’ll dine here?” said the butler.

“Yes; I must have my dinner, of course,” replied Mr. Sponge. “I’m not ill, you know; no occasion to make a great spread for me, you know; but still I must have some victuals, you know.”

“Certainly, sir, certainly,” replied Mr. Plummey.

“I couldn’t think of leaving Mr. Puffington when he’s poorly,” observed Mr. Sponge, half to himself and half to the butler.

“Oh, master—that’s to say, Mr. Puffington—always does

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best when left alone," observed Mr. Plummey, catching at the sentence: "indeed the medical men recommend perfect quiet and moderate living as the best thing."

"Do they?" replied Sponge, taking out another cigar. Mr. Plummey then withdrew, and presently went upstairs to report progress, or rather want of progress, to the gentleman whom he sometimes condescended to call "master."

Mr. Puffington had been taking another spell at the paper, and we need hardly say, that the more he read of the run the less he liked it.

"Ah, that's Mr. Sponge's handiwork," observed Plummey, as with a sneer of disgust Mr. Puffington threw the paper from him as Plummey entered the room.

"How do you know?" asked Mr. Puffington.

"Saw it, sir—saw it in the letter-bag going to the post."

"Indeed!" replied Mr. Puffington.

"Mr. Spraggon and he did it after they came in from hunting."

"I thought as much," replied Mr. Puffington, in disgust.

Mr. Plummey then related how unsuccessful had been his attempts to get rid of the now most unwelcome guest. Mr. Puffington listened with attention, determined to get rid of him somehow or other. Plummey was instructed to ply Sponge well with hints, all of which, however, Mr. Sponge skilfully parried. So, at last, Mr. Puffington scrawled a miserable-looking note, explaining how very ill he was, how he regretted being deprived of Mr. Sponge's agreeable society, but hoping that it would suit Mr. Sponge to return as soon as he was better and pay the remainder of his visit—a pretty intelligible notice to quit, and one which even the cool Mr. Sponge was rather at a loss how to parry.

He did not like the aspect of affairs. In addition to having to spend the evening by himself, the cook sent him a very moderate dinner, smoked soup, sodden fish, scraggy cutlets, and sour pudding. Mr. Plummey, too, seemed to have put all the company bottle-ends together for him. This would not do. If Sponge could have satisfied himself that his host would be

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better in a day or two, he would not have thought seriously of leaving ; but as he could not bring himself to think that he would not, and, moreover, had no place to go to, had it not been for the concluding portion of Mr. Puffington's note, he would have made an effort to stay. That, however, put it rather out of his power, especially as it was done so politely, and hinted at a renewal of the visit. Mr. Sponge spent the evening in cogitating what he should do—thinking what sportsmen had held out the hand of good fellowship, and hinted at hoping to have the pleasure of seeing him. Fyle, Fossick, Blossomnose, Capon, Dribble, Hook, and others, were all run through his mind, without his thinking it prudent to attempt to fix a volunteer visit upon any of them. Many people he knew could pen polite excuses, who yet could not hit them off at the moment, especially in that great area of hospitality—the hunting-field. He went to bed very much perplexed.

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CHAPTER XLV.

WANTED—A RICH GOD-PAPA!



“WHEN one door shuts another opens,” say the saucy servants; and fortune was equally favourable to our friend Mr. Sponge. Though he could not think of any one to whom he could volunteer a visit, Dame Fortune provided him with an overture from a party who wanted him! But we will introduce his new host, or rather victim.

People hunt from various motives—some for the love of the thing—some for show—some for fashion—some for health—some for appetites—some for coffee-housing—some to say they have hunted—some because others hunt.

Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey did not hunt from any of these motives, and it would puzzle a conjurer to make out why he hunted; indeed, the members of the different hunts he patronised—for he was one of the run-about, non-subscribing sort—were long in finding out. It was observed that he generally affected countries abounding in large woods, such as Stretchaway Forest, Hazelbury Chase, and Oakington Banks, into which he would dive with the greatest avidity. At first people thought he was a very keen hand, anxious to see a fox handsomely found, if he could not see him handsomely finished, against which latter luxury his figure and activity, or want of activity, were somewhat opposed. Indeed, when we say that he went by the name of the Woolpack, our readers will be able to imagine the style of man he was: long-headed, short-necked, large-girthed, dumpling-legged little fellow, who, like

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most fat men, made himself dangerous by compressing a most unreasonable stomach into a circumscribed coat, each particular button of which looked as if it was ready to burst off and knock out the eye of any one who might have the temerity to ride alongside of him. He was a puffy, wheezy, sententious little fellow, who accompanied his parables with a snort into a large, finely-plaited shirt-frill, reaching nearly up to his nose. His hunting-costume consisted of a black coat and waistcoat, with white moleskin breeches, much cracked and darned about the knees and other parts, as nether garments made of that treacherous stuff often are. His shapeless tops, made regardless of the refinements of "right and left," dangled at his horse's sides like a couple of stable-buckets; and he carried his heavy iron hammer-headed whip over his shoulder like a flail. But we are drawing his portrait instead of saying why he hunted. Well then, having married Mrs. Springwheat's sister, who was always boasting to Mrs. Crowdey what a loving, doating husband Springey was after hunting, Mrs. Crowdey had induced Crowdey to try his hand, and though soon satisfied that he hadn't the slightest taste for the sport, but being a great man for what he called gibbey-sticks, he hunted for the purpose of finding them. As we said before, he generally appeared at large woodlands, into which he would ride with the hounds, plunging through the stiffest clay, and forcing his way through the strongest thickets, making observations all the while of the hazels, and the hollies, and the black thorns, and, we are sorry to say, sometimes of the young oaks and ashes, that he thought would fashion into curious-handled walking-sticks; and these he would return for at a future day, getting them with as large clubs as possible, which he would cut into the heads of beasts, or birds, or fishes, or men. At the time of which we are writing, he had accumulated a vast quantity—thousands; the garret at the top of his house was quite full, so were most of the closets, while the rafters in the kitchen, and cellars, and outhouses, were crowded with others in a state of *déshabille*. He calculated his stock at immense worth, we don't know how many thousand pounds; and as he cut, and

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puffed, and wheezed, and modelled, with a volume of Buffon or the picture of some eminent man before him, he chuckled, and thought how well he was providing for his family. He had been at it so long, and argued so stoutly, that Mrs. Jogglebury Crowdey, if not quite convinced of the accuracy of his calculations, nevertheless thought it well to encourage his hunting predilections, inasmuch as it brought him in contact with people he would not otherwise meet, who, she thought, might possibly be useful to their children. Accordingly, she got him his breakfast betimes on hunting-mornings, charged his pockets with currant buns, and saw to the mending of his moleskins when he came home, after any of those casualties that occur as well in the chase as in gibbey-stick hunting.

A stranger being a marked man in a rural country, Mr. Sponge excited more curiosity in Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey's mind than Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey did in Mr. Sponge's. In truth, Jogglebury was one of those unsportsman-like beings, that a regular fox-hunter would think it waste of words to inquire about, and if Mr. Sponge saw him, he did not recollect him; while, on the other hand, Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey went home very full of our friend. Now, Mrs. Jogglebury Crowdey was a fine, bustling, managing woman, with a large family, for whom she exerted all her energies to procure desirable god-papas and mammas; and, no sooner did she hear of this new-comer, than she longed to appropriate him for god-papa to their youngest son.

"Jog, my dear," said she to her spouse, as they sat at tea; "it would be well to look after him."

"What for, my dear?" asked Jog, who was staring a stick, with a half-finished head of Lord Brougham for a handle, out of countenance.

"What for, Jog? Why, can't you guess?"

"No," replied Jog, doggedly.

"No!" ejaculated his spouse. "Why, Jog, you certainly are the stupidest man in existence."

"Not necessarily!" replied Jog, with a jerk of his head and a puff into his shirt-frill that set it all in a flutter.

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"Not necessarily!" replied Mrs. Jogglebury, who was what they call a "spirited woman," in the same rising tone as before. "Not necessarily! but I say necessarily—yes, necessarily. Do you hear me, Mr. Jogglebury?"

"I hear you," replied Jogglebury, scornfully, with another jerk, and another puff into the frill.

The two then sat silent for some minutes, Jogglebury still contemplating the progressing head of Lord Brougham, and recalling the eye and features that some five and twenty years before had nearly withered him in a breach of promise action, "Smiler *v.* Jogglebury," that being our friend's name before his uncle Crowdey left him his property.

Mrs. Jogglebury having an object in view, and knowing that, though Jogglebury might lead, he would not drive, availed herself of the lull to trim her sail, to try and catch him on the other tack.

"Well, Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey," said she, in a passive tone of regret, "I certainly thought, however indifferent you might be to me" (and here she applied her handkerchief—rather a coarse one—to her eyes) "that still you had some regard for the interests of your (sob) children;" and here the waterfalls of her beady black eyes went off in a gush.

"Well, my dear," replied Jogglebury, softened, "I'm (puff) sure I'm (wheeze) anxious for my (puff) children. You don't s'pose if I wasn't (puff), I'd (wheeze) labour as I (puff—wheeze) do to leave them fortins?"—alluding to his exertions in the gibbey-stick line.

"Oh, Jog, I daresay you're very good, and very industrious," sobbed Mrs. Jogglebury, "but I sometimes (sob) think that you might apply your (sob) energies to a better (sob) purpose."

"Indeed, my dear (puff), I don't see that (wheeze)," replied Jogglebury, mildly.

"Why, now, if you were to try and get this rich Mr. Sponge for a god-papa for Gustavus James," continued she, drying her eyes as she came to the point, "*that*, I should say, would be worthy of you."



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"But, my (puff) dear," replied Jogglebury, "I don't know Mr. (wheeze) Sponge, to begin with."

"That's nothing," replied Mrs. Jogglebury; "he's a stranger, and you should call upon him."

Mr. Jogglebury sat silent, still staring at Lord Brougham, thinking how he pitched into him, and how sick he was when the jury, without retiring from the box, gave five hundred pounds damages against him.

"He's a fox-hunter, too," continued his wife; "and you ought to be civil to him."

"Well, but, my (puff) dear, he's as likely to (wheeze) these fifty years as any (puff, wheeze) man I ever looked at," replied Jogglebury.

"Oh, nonsense," replied Mrs. Jogglebury; "there's no saying when a fox-hunter may break his neck. My word! but Mrs. Slooman tells me pretty stories of Sloo's doings with the harriers—jumping over hurdles, and everything that comes in the way, and galloping along the stony lanes as if the wind was a snail compared to his horse. I tell you, Jog, you should call on this gentleman——"

"Well," replied Mr. Jogglebury.

"And ask him to come and stay here," continued Mrs. Jogglebury.

"Perhaps he mightn't like it (puff)," replied Jogglebury. "I don't know that we could (puff) entertain him as he's (wheeze) accustomed to be," added he.

"Oh, nonsense," replied Mrs. Jogglebury; "we can entertain him well enough. You always say fox-hunters are not ceremonious. I tell you what, Jog, you don't think half enough of yourself. You are far too easily set aside. My word! but I know some people who would give themselves pretty airs if their husband was chairman of a board of guardians, and trustee of I don't know how many of Her Majesty's turnpike-roads," Mrs. Jog here thinking of her sister Mrs. Springwheat, who, she used to say, had married a mere farmer. "I tell you, Jog, you're far too humble, you don't think half enough of yourself."

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"Well, but, my (puff) dear, you don't (puff) consider that all people ain't (puff) fond of (wheeze) children," observed Jogglebury, after a pause. "Indeed, I've (puff) observed that some (wheeze) don't like them."

"Oh, but those will be nasty little brats, like Mrs. James Wakenshaw's, or Mrs. Tom Cheek's. But such children as ours! such charmers! such delights! there isn't a man in the county, from the Lord-Lieutenant downwards, who wouldn't be proud—who wouldn't think it a compliment—to be asked to be god-papa to such children. I tell you what, Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey, it would be far better to get them rich god-papas and god-mammas than to leave them a whole house full of sticks."

"Well, but, my (puff) dear, the (wheeze) sticks will prove very (wheeze) hereafter," replied Jogglebury, bridling up at the imputation on his hobby.

"I *hope* so," replied Mrs. Jogglebury, in a tone of incredulity.

"Well, but, my (puff) dear, I (wheeze) you that they will be—indeed (puff), I may (wheeze) say that they (puff) are. It was only the other (puff) day that (wheeze) Patrick O'Fogo offered me five-and-twenty (wheeze) shillings for my (puff) blackthorn Daniel O'Connell, which is by no means so (puff) good as the (wheeze) wild-cherry one, or, indeed, (puff) as the yew-tree one that I (wheeze) out of Spankerley Park."

"I'd have taken it if I'd been you," observed Mrs. Jogglebury.

"But he's (puff) worth far more," retorted Jogglebury, angrily; "why (wheeze) Lumpleg offered me as much for Disraeli."

"Well, I'd have taken it, too," rejoined Mrs. Jogglebury.

"But I should have (wheeze) spoilt my (puff) set," replied the gibbey-stick man. "S'pose any (wheeze) body was to (puff) offer me five guineas a (puff) piece for the (puff) pick of my (puff) collection—my (puff) Wellingtons, my (wheeze) Napoleons, my (puff) Byrons, my (wheeze) Walter Scotts, my (puff) Lord Johns, d'ye think I'd take it?"

"I should *hope* so," replied Mrs. Jogglebury.

"I should (puff) do no such thing," snorted her husband

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into his frill. "I should hope," continued he, speaking slowly and solemnly, "that a (puff) wise ministry will purchase the whole (puff) collection for a (wheeze) grateful nation, when the (wheeze)" something "is no more (wheeze)." The concluding words being lost in the emotion of the speaker (as the reporters say).

"Well, but will you go and call on Mr. Sponge, dear?" asked Mrs. Jogglebury Crowdey, anxious as well to turn the subject as to make good her original point.

"Well, my dear, I've no objection," replied Joggle, wiping a tear from the corner of his eye with his coat-cuff.

"That's a good soul!" exclaimed Mrs. Jogglebury, soothingly. "Go to-morrow, like a nice, sensible man."

"Very well," replied her now complacent spouse.

"And ask him to come here," continued she.

"I can't (puff) ask him to (puff) come, my dear (wheeze), until he (puff—wheeze) returns my (puff) call."

"O fiddle," replied his wife, "you always say fox-hunters never stand upon ceremony; why should you stand upon any with him?"

Mr. Jogglebury was posed, and sat silent.

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CHAPTER XLVI.

THE DISCOMFITED DIPLOMATIST.



ELL then, as we said before, when one door shuts another opens; and just as Mr. Puffington's door was closing on poor Mr. Sponge, who should cast up but our newly-introduced friend, Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey. Mr. Sponge was sitting in solitary state, in the fine drawing-room, studying his old friend Mogg, calculating what he could ride from Spur Street, Leicester Square, by Short's Gardens, and across Waterloo Bridge, to the Elephant and Castle for, when the grinding of a vehicle on the gravelled ring, attracted his attention. Looking out of the window, he saw a horse's head in a faded-red silk-fronted bridle, with the letters "J. C." on the blinkers; not J. C. writhing in the elegant contortions of modern science, but "J. C." in the good, plain, matter-of-fact characters we have depicted above.

"That'll be the doctor," said Mr. Sponge to himself, as he resumed his reading and calculations, amidst a peal of the door-bell, well calculated to arouse the whole house. "He's a good 'un to ring!" added he, looking up and wondering when the last lingering tinkle would cease.

Before the fact was ascertained, there was a hurried tramp of feet past the drawing-room door, and presently the entrance one opened and let in—a rush of wind.

"Is Mr. Sponge at home?" demanded a slow, pompous-speaking, deep-toned voice, evidently from the vehicle.

"Yez-ur," was the immediate answer.

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"Who can that be?" exclaimed Sponge, pocketing his Mogg.

Then there was a creaking of springs and a jingling against iron steps, and presently a high-blowing, heavy-stepping body was heard crossing the entrance-hall, while an out-stripping footman announced Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey, leaving the owner to follow his name at his leisure.

Mrs. Jogglebury had insisted on Jog putting on his new black frock—a very long coat, fitting like a sack, with the well-filled pockets bagging behind, like a poor man's dinner-wallet. In lieu of the shrunk and darned white moleskins, receding in apparent disgust from the dingy tops, he had got his nether man enveloped in a pair of fine cinnamon-coloured tweeds, with broad blue stripes down the sides, and shaped out over the clumsy foot.

Puff, wheeze, puff, he now came waddling and labouring along, hat in hand, hurrying after the servant; puff, wheeze, puff, and he found himself in the room. "Your servant, sir," said he, sticking himself out behind, and addressing Mr. Sponge, making a ground sweep with his woolly hat.

"*Yours*," said Mr. Sponge, with a similar bow.

"Fine day (puff—wheeze)," observed Mr. Jogglebury, blowing into his large frill.

"It is," replied Mr. Sponge; adding, "won't you be seated?"

"How's Puffington?" gasped our visitor, sousing himself upon one of the rosewood chairs in a way that threatened destruction to the slender fabric.

"Oh, he's pretty middling, *I* should say," replied Sponge, now making up his mind that he was addressing the doctor.

"Pretty middlin' (puff)," repeated Jogglebury, blowing into his frill, "pretty middlin' (wheeze); I s'pose that means he's got a (puff) gumboil. My third (wheeze) girl, Margaret Henrietta, has one."

"Do you want to see him?" asked Sponge, after a pause, which seemed to indicate that his friend's conversation had come to a period, or full stop.

"No," replied Jogglebury, unconcernedly. "No; I'll leave a (puff) card for him (wheeze)," added he, fumbling in his



MR. JOGGLEBURY INTRODUCING HIMSELF TO MR. SPONGE.

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wallet behind for his card-case. "My (puff) object is to pay my (wheeze) respects to you," observed he, drawing a great carved Indian case from his pocket, and pulling off the top with a noise like the drawing of a cork.

"Much obliged for the compliment," observed Mr. Sponge, as Jogglebury fumbled and broke his nails in attempting to get a card out.

"Do you stay long in this part of the world?" asked he, as at last he succeeded, and commenced tapping the corners of the card on the table.

"I really don't know," replied Mr. Sponge, as the particulars of his situation flashed across his mind. Could this pudding-headed man be a chap Puffington had got to come and sound him, thought he.

Jogglebury sat silent for a time, examining his feet attentively as if to see they were pairs, and scrutinising the bags of his cinnamon-coloured trousers.

"I was going to say (hem—cough—hem)," at length observed he, looking up; "that's to say, I was thinking (hem—wheeze—cough—hem), or rather I should say, Mrs. Jogglebury Crowdey sent me to say—I mean to say," continued he, stamping one of his ponderous feet against the floor as if to force out his words, "Mrs. Jogglebury Crowdey and I would be glad—happy, that's to say (hem)—if you could arrange (hem) to (wheeze) pay us a visit (hem)."

"Most happy, I'm sure!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, jumping at the offer.

"Before you go (hem)," continued our visitor, taking up the sentence where Sponge had interrupted him; "I (hem) live about nine miles (hem) from here (hem)."

"Are there any hounds in your neighbourhood?" asked Mr. Sponge.

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Jogglebury, slowly; "Mr. Puffington here draws up to Greatacre Gorse within a few (puff—wheeze) miles—say, three (puff)—of my (wheeze) house; and Sir Harry Scattercash (puff) hunts all the (puff—wheeze) country below, right away down to the (puff—wheeze) sea."

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"Well, you're a *devilish* good fellow!" exclaimed Sponge; "and I'll tell you what, as I'm sure you mean what you say, I'll take you at your word and go at once; and that'll give our friend here time to come round."

"Oh, but (puff—wheeze—gasp)," started Mr. Jogglebury, the blood rushing to his great yellow, whiskerless cheeks, "I'm not quite (gasp) sure that Mrs. (gasp) Jogglebury (puff) Crowdey would be (puff—wheeze—gasp) prepared."

"Oh, *hang* preparation!" interrupted Mr. Sponge. "I'll take you as you are. Never mind me. I hate being made company of. Just treat me like one of yourselves; toad-in-the-hole, dog-in-the-blanket, beefsteaks and oyster-sauce, rabbits and onions—anything; nothing comes amiss to me."

So saying, and while Jogglebury sat purple and unable to articulate, Mr. Sponge applied his hand to the ivory bell-knob and sounded an imposing peal. Mr. Jogglebury sat wondering what was going to happen, and thinking what a wiggling he would get from Mrs. J. if he didn't manage to shake off his friend. Above all, he recollected that they had nothing but haddocks and hashed mutton for dinner.

"Tell Leather I want him," said Mr. Sponge, in a tone of authority, as the footman answered the summons; then, turning to his guest, as the man was leaving the room, he said, "Won't you take something after your drive—cold meat, glass of sherry, soda-water, bottled porter—anything in that line?"

In an ordinary way, Jogglebury would have said, "if you please," at the sound of the words "cold meat," for he was a dead hand at luncheon; but the fix he was in completely took away his appetite, and he sat wheezing and thinking whether to make another effort, or to wait the arrival of Leather.

Presently Leather appeared, jean-jacketed and gaitered, smoothing his hair over his forehead, after the manner of the brotherhood.

"Leather," said Mr. Sponge, in the same tone of importance, "I'm going to this gentleman's:" for as yet he had not sufficiently mastered the name to be able to venture upon it in the owner's presence. "Leather, I'm going to this gentleman's,

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and I want you to bring me a horse over in the morning ; or stay," said he, interrupting himself, and, turning to Jogglebury, he exclaimed, "I dare say you could manage to put me up a couple of horses, couldn't you? and then we should be all cosy and jolly together, you know."

"'Pon my word," gasped Jogglebury, nearly choked by the proposal; "'pon my word, I can hardly (puff) say, I hardly (wheeze) know, but if you'll (puff—wheeze) allow me, I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll (puff—wheeze) home, and see what I can (puff) do in the way of entertainment for (puff—wheeze) man as well as for (puff—wheeze) horse."

"Oh, *thank you*, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Sponge, seeing the intended dodge; "*thank you*, my dear fellow!" repeated he; "but that's giving you too much trouble—*far* too much trouble!—couldn't think of such a thing—no, indeed, I couldn't. *I'll* tell you what we'll do—*I'll* tell you what we'll do. You shall drive me over in that shandry-dan-rattle-trap thing of yours"—Sponge looking out of the window, as he spoke, at the queer-shaped, jumped-together, lack-lustre-looking vehicle, with a turnover seat behind, now in charge of a pepper-and-salt attired youth, with a shabby hat, looped up by a thin silver cord to an acorn on the crown, and baggy Berlin gloves—"and I'll just see what there is in the way of stabling; and if I think it will do, then I'll give a boy sixpence or a shilling to come over to Leather, here," jerking his head towards his factotum; "if it won't do, why then——"

"We shall want *three* stalls, sir—recollect, sir," interrupted Leather, who did not wish to move his quarters.

"True, I forgot," replied Sponge, with a frown at his servant's officiousness; "however, if we can get two good stalls for the hunters," said he, "we'll manage the hack somehow or other."

"Well," replied Mr. Leather, in a tone of resignation, knowing how hopeless it was arguing with his master.

"I really think," gasped Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey, encouraged by the apparent sympathy of the servant to make a last effort—"I really think," repeated he, as the hashed mutton and

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haddocks again flashed across his mind, "that my (puff—wheeze) plan is the (puff) best; let me (puff—wheeze) home and see how all (puff—wheeze) things are, and then I'll write you a (puff—wheeze) line, or send a (puff—wheeze) servant over."

"Oh, no," replied Mr. Sponge—"oh, no—that's far too much trouble. I'll just go over with you now and reconnoitre."

"I'm afraid Mrs. (puff—wheeze) Crowdey will hardly be prepared for (puff—wheeze) visitors," ejaculated our friend, recollecting it was washing-day, and that Mary Ann would be wanted in the laundry.

"Don't mention it!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge; "don't mention it. I hate to be made company of. Just give me what you have yourselves—just give me what you have yourselves. Where two can dine, three can dine, you know."

Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey was nonplussed.

"Well, now," said Mr. Sponge, turning again to Leather; "just go up-stairs and help me to pack up my things; and," addressing himself to our visitor he said, "perhaps you'll amuse yourself with the paper—the *Post*—or I'll lend you my Mogg," continued he, offering the little gilt-lettered, purple-backed volume as he spoke.

"Thank'ee," replied Mr. Jogglebury, who was still tapping away at the card, which he had now worked very soft.

Mr. Sponge then left him with the volume in his hand, and proceeded up-stairs to his bed-room.

In less than twenty minutes, the vehicle was got under way, Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey and Mr. Sponge occupying the roomy seats in front, and Bartholomew Badger, the before-mentioned tiger, and Mr. Sponge's portmanteau and carpet-bag, being in the very diminutive turnover seat behind. The carriage was followed by the straining eyes of sundry Johns and Janes, who unanimously agreed that Mr. Sponge was the meanest, shabbiest gent. they had ever had in *their* house. Mr. Leather was, therefore, roasted in the servants' hall, where the sins of the masters are oft visited upon the servants.

But to our travellers.

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

Little conversation passed between our friends for the first few miles, for, in addition to the road being rough, the driving-seat was so high, and the other so low, that Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey's parables broke against Mr. Sponge's hat-crown, instead of dropping into his ear; besides which, the unwilling host's mind was a good deal occupied with wishing that there had been three haddocks instead of two, and speculating whether Mrs. Crowdey would be more pleased at the success of his mission, or put out of her way by Mr. Sponge's unexpected coming. Above all, he had marked some very promising-looking sticks—two blackthorns and a holly—to cut on his way home, and he was intent on not missing them. So sudden was the jerk that announced his coming on the first one, as nearly to throw the old family horse on his knees, and almost to break Mr. Sponge's nose against the brass edge of the cocked-up splash-board. Ere Mr. Sponge recovered his equilibrium, the whip was in the case, the reins dangling about the old screw's heels, and Mr. Crowdey scrambling up a steep bank to where a very thick boundary-hedge shut out the view of the adjacent country. Presently, chop, chop, chop, was heard, from Mr. Crowdey's pocket axe, with a tug—wheeze—puff from himself; next a crash of separation; and then the purple-faced Mr. Crowdey came bearing down the bank, dragging a great blackthorn bush after him.

"What have you got there?" inquired Mr. Sponge, with surprise.

"Got! (wheeze—puff—wheeze)," replied Mr. Crowdey, pulling up short, and mopping his perspiring brow with a great claret-coloured bandana. "Got! I've (puff—wheeze) got what I (wheeze) think will (puff) into a most elaborate and (wheeze) valuable walking-stick. This, I (puff) think," continued he, eyeing the great ball with which he had got it up, "will (wheeze) come in most valuably (puff) for my great (puff—wheeze—gasp) national undertaking—the (puff) Kings and (wheeze) Queens of Great Britain (gasp)."

"What are *they*?" asked Mr. Sponge, astonished at his vehemence.

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

"Oh! (puff—wheeze—gasp) haven't you heard?" exclaimed Mr. Jogglebury, taking off his great woolly hat, and giving his lank, dark hair, streaked with grey, a sweep round his low forehead with the bandana. "Oh! (puff—gasp) haven't you heard?" repeated he, getting a little more breath. "I'm (wheeze) undertaking a series of (gasp) sticks, representing—(gasp)—*immortalising*, I may say (puff), all the (wheeze) crowned heads of England (puff)."

"Indeed!" replied Mr. Sponge.

"They'll be a most valuable collection (wheeze—puff)," continued Mr. Jogglebury, still eyeing the knob. "This," added he, "shall be William the Fourth." He then commenced lopping and docking the sides, making Bartholomew Badger bury them in a sand-pit hard by, observing, in a confidential wheeze to Mr. Sponge, "that he had once been county-courted for a similar trespass before." The top and lop being at length disposed of, Mr. Crowdey, grasping the club-end, struck the other forcibly against the ground, exclaiming, "*There!*—there's a (puff) stick! Who knows what that (puff—wheeze) stick may be worth some day?"

He then bundled into his carriage and drove on.

Two more stoppages marked their arrival at the other sticks, which being duly captured and fastened within the straps of the carriage-apron, Mr. Crowdey drove on somewhat more at ease in his mind, at all events somewhat comforted at the thoughts of having increased his wealth. He did not become talkative—indeed that was not his forte, but he puffed into his shirt-frill, and made a few observations, which, if they did not possess much originality, at all events showed that he was not asleep.

"Those are draining-tiles," said he, after a hearty stare at a cart-load. Then about five minutes after he blew again, and said, "I don't think (puff) that (wheeze) draining without (gasp) manuring will constitute good farming (puff)."

So he jolted and wheezed, and jerked and jagged the old quadruped's mouth, occasionally hissing between his teeth, and stamping against the bottom of the carriage, when other

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

persuasive efforts failed to induce it to keep up the semblance of a trot. At last the ill-supported hobble died out into a walk, and Mr. Crowdey, complacently dropping his fat hand on his fat knees, seemed to resign himself to his fate.

So they crawled along the up-and-downy piece of road below Poplarton plantations, Mr. Jogglebury keeping a sharp eye upon the underwood for sticks. After passing these, they commenced the gradual ascent of Roundington Hill, when a sudden sweep of the road brought them in view of the panorama of the rich Vale of Butterflower.

"There's a snug-looking box," observed Sponge, as he at length espied a confused jumble of gable-ends and chimney-pots, rising from amidst a clump of Scotch firs and other trees, looking less like a farm-house than anything he had seen.

"That's my *house* (puff); that's Puddingpote Bower (wheeze)," replied Crowdey, slowly and pompously, adding an "e" to the syllable, to make it sound better, the haddocks, hashed mutton, and all the horrors of impromptu hospitality rushing upon his mind.

Things began to look worse the nearer he got home. He didn't care to aggravate the old animal into a trot. He again wondered whether Mrs. J. would be pleased at the success of his mission, or angry at the unexpected coming.

"Where are the stables?" asked Sponge, as he scanned the in-and-out irregularities of the building.

"Stables (wheeze), stables (puff)," repeated Crowdey, thinking of his troubles—of its being washing-day, and Mary Ann, or Murry Ann, as he called her, the under-butler, being engaged; of Bartholomew Badger having the horse and *fe-a-ton* to clean, &c.—"stables," repeated he for the third time; "stables are at the back, behind, in fact; you'll see a (puff) vane—a (wheeze) fox, on the top."

"Ah, indeed!" replied Mr. Sponge, brightening up, thinking there would be old hay and corn.

They now came to a half-Swiss, half-Gothic little cottage of a lodge, and the old horse turned instinctively into the open white gate with pea-green bands.



MR. JOGGLEBURY CROWDEY AND FAMILY.

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

"Here's Mrs. Crow—Crow—Crowdey!" gasped Jogglebury, convulsively, as a tall woman, in flare-up red and yellow stunner tartan, with a swarm of little children, similarly attired, suddenly appeared at an angle of the road, the lady handling a great alpaca umbrella-looking parasol in the stand-and-deliver style.

"What's kept you?" exclaimed she, as the vehicle got within ear-shot. "What's *kept* you?" repeated she, in a sharper key, holding her parasol across the road, but taking no notice of our friend Sponge, who, in truth, she took for Edgebone, the butcher. "Oh! you've been after your sticks, have you?" added she, as her spouse drew the vehicle up along-side of her, and she caught the contents of the apron-straps.

"My dear (puff)" gasped her husband, "I've brought Mr. (wheeze) Sponge," said he, winking his right eye, and jerking his head over his left shoulder, looking very frightened all the time. "Mr. (puff) Sponge, Mrs. (gasps) Jogglebury (wheeze) Crowdey," continued he, motioning with his hand.

Finding himself in the presence of his handsome hostess, Sponge made her one of his best bows, and offered to resign his seat in the carriage to her. This she declined, alleging that she had the children with her—looking round on the grinning, gaping group, the majority of them with their mouths smeared with lollipops. Crowdey, who was not so stupid as he looked, was nettled at Sponge's attempting to fix his wife upon him at such a critical moment, and immediately retaliated with "P'r'aps (puff) you'd like to (puff) out and (wheeze) walk."

There was no help for this, and Sponge having alighted, Mr. Crowdey said, half to Mr. Sponge, and half to his fine wife, "Then (puff—wheeze) I'll just (puff) on and get Mr. (wheeze) Sponge's room ready." So saying, he gave the old nag a hearty jerk with the bit, and two or three longitudinal cuts with the knotty-pointed whip, and jingled away with a bevy of children shouting, hanging on, and dragging behind, amidst exclamations from Mrs. Crowdey, of "O Anna Maria! Juliana Jane! O Frederick James, you naughty boy! you'll spoil your new

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shoes! Archibald John, you'll be kilt! you'll be run over to a certainty. O Jogglebury, you inhuman man!" continued she, running and brandishing her alpaca parasol, "you'll run over your children! you'll run over your children!"

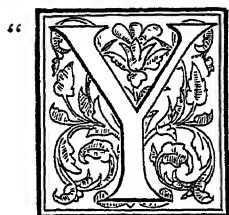
"My (puff) dear," replied Jogglebury, looking coolly over his shoulder, "how can they be (wheeze) run over behind?"

So saying, Jogglebury ground away at his leisure.

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

CHAPTER XLVII.

PUDDINGPOTE BOWER, THE SEAT OF JOGGLEBURY
CROWDEY, ESQ.



“OUR good husband,” observed Mr. Sponge, as he now overtook his hostess and proceeded with her towards the house, “has insisted upon bringing me over to spend a few days till my friend Puffington recovers. He’s just got the gout. I said I was ’fraid it mightn’t be quite convenient to you, but Mr. Crowdey assured me you were in the habit of receivin’ fox-hunters at short notice; and so I have taken him at his word you see, and come.”

Mrs. Jogglebury, who was still out of wind from her run after the carriage, assured him that she was extremely happy to see him, though she couldn’t help thinking what a noodle Jog was to bring a stranger on a washing-day. That, however, was a point she would reserve for Jog.

Just then a loud outburst from the children announced the approach of the eighth wonder of the world, in the person of Gustavus James in the nurse’s arms, with a curly blue feather nodding over his nose. Mrs. Jogglebury’s black eyes brightened with delight as she ran forward to meet him; and in her mind’s eye she saw him inheriting a splendid mansion, with a retinue of powdered footmen in pea-green liveries and broad gold laced hats. Great—prospectively great, at least—as had been her successes in the sponsor line with her other children, she really thought, getting Mr. Sponge for a god-papa for Gustavus James eclipsed all her other doings.

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Mr. Sponge, having been liberal in his admiration of the other children, of course could not refuse unbounded applause to the evident object of a mother's regards; and, chucking the young gentleman under his double chin, asked him how he was, and said something about something he had in his "box," alluding to a paper of cheap comfits he had bought at Sugarchalk's, the confectioner's sale in Oxford Street, and which he carried about for contingencies like the present. This pleased Mrs. Crowdey—looking, as she thought, as if he had come predetermined to do what she wanted. Amidst praises and stories of the prodigy, they reached the house.

If a "hall" means a house with an entrance "hall," Puddingpote Bower did not aspire to be one. A visitor dived, *in medias res*, into the passage at once. In it stood an oak-cased family clock, and a large glass case, with an alarming-looking stuffed tiger-like cat, on an imitation marble slab. Underneath the slab, indeed all about the passage, were scattered children's hats and caps, hoops, tops, spades, and mutilated toys—spotted horses without heads, soldiers without arms, windmills without sails, and wheelbarrows without wheels. In a corner were a bunch of "gibbeys" in the rough, and alongside the weather-glass hung Jog's formidable flail of a hunting-whip.

Mr. Sponge found his portmanteau standing bolt upright in the passage, with the bag alongside of it, just as they had been chucked out of the phaeton by Bartholomew Badger, who having got orders to put the horse right, and then to put himself right to wait at dinner, Mr. Jogglebury proceeded to vociferate—

"Murry Ann!—Murry Ann!" in such a way that Mary Ann thought either that the cat had got young Crowdey, or the house was on fire. "Oh! Murry Ann!" exclaimed Mr. Jogglebury, as she came darting into the passage from the back settlements, up to the elbows in soap-suds; "I want you to (puff) upstairs with me, and help to get my (wheeze) gibbey sticks out of the best room; there's a (puff) gentleman coming to (wheeze) here."

"O, indeed, sir," replied Mary Ann, smiling, and dropping down her sleeves—glad to find it was no worse.

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They then proceeded upstairs together.

All the gibbey sticks were bundled out, both the finished ones, that were varnished and laid away carefully in the wardrobe, and those that were undergoing surgical treatment, in the way of twistings, and bendings, and tyings in the closets. As they routed them out of hole and corner, Jogglebury kept up a sort of running recommendation to mercy, mingled with an inquiry into the state of the household affairs.

"Now (puff), Murry Ann!" exclaimed he; "take care you don't scratch that (puff) Franky Burdett," handing her a highly-varnished oak stick, with a head of Sir Francis for a handle: "and how many (gasp) haddocks d'ye say there are in the house?"

"Three, sir," replied Mary Ann.

"Three!" repeated he, with an emphasis. "I thought your (gasp) missus told me there were but (puff) two; and, Murry Ann, you must put the new (puff) quilt on the (gasp) bed, and (puff) just look under it (gasp), and you'll find the (puff) old Truro rolled up in a dirty (puff) pocket handkercher; and, Murry Ann, d'ye think the new (wheeze) purtaters came that I bought of (puff) Billy Bloxom? If so, you'd better (puff) some for dinner, and get the best (wheeze) decanters out; and Murry Ann, there are two gibbeys on the (puff) surbase at the back of the bed, which you may as well (puff) away. Ah! here he is," added Mr. Jogglebury, as Mr. Sponge's voice rose now from the passage into the room above.

Things now looked pretty promising. Mr. Sponge's attentions to the children generally, and to Gustavus James in particular, coupled with his free-and-easy mode of introducing himself, made Mrs. Crowdey feel far more at her ease with regard to entertaining him than she would have done if her neighbour, Mr. Makepeace, or the Rev. Mr. Facey himself, had dropped in to take "pot luck," as they called it. With either of these she would have wished to appear as if their every-day form was more in accordance with their company style, whereas Jog and she wanted to get something out of Mr. Sponge instead of electrifying him with their grandeur.



BARTHOLOMEW AND MURRY ANN.

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

That Gustavus James was destined for greatness she had not the least doubt. She began to think whether it might not be advisable to call him Gustavus James Sponge. Jog, too, was comforted, at hearing there were three haddocks, for though hospitably inclined he did not at all like the idea of being on short commons himself. He had sufficient confidence in Mrs. Jogglebury's management—especially as the guest was of her own seeking—to know that she would make up a tolerable dinner.

Nor was he out in his reckoning, for at half-past five Bartholomew announced dinner, when in sailed Mrs. Crowdey fresh from the composition of it and from the becoming revision of her own dress. Instead of the loose, flowing, gipsified, stunner tartan of the morning, she was attired in a close-fitting French grey silk, showing as well the fulness and whiteness of her exquisite bust, as the beautiful formation of her arms. Her raven hair was ably parted and flattened on either side of her well-shaped head. Sponge felt proud of the honour of having such a fine creature on his arm, and kicked about in his tights more than usual.

The dinner, though it might show symptoms of hurry, was yet plentiful and good of its kind; and, if Bartholomew had not been always getting in Murry Ann's way, would have been well set on and served. Jog quaffed quantities of foaming bottled porter during the progress of it, and threw himself back in his chair at the end, as if thoroughly overcome with his exertions. Scarcely were the wine and dessert set on, ere a violent outbreak in the nursery caused Mrs. Crowdey to hurry away, leaving Mr. Sponge to enjoy the company of her husband.

"You'll drink (puff) fox-hunting, I s'pose," observed Jog, after a pause, helping himself to a bumper of port and passing the bottle to Sponge.

"With all my heart," replied our hero, filling up.

"Fine (puff, wheeze) amusement," observed Mr. Crowdey, with a yawn after another pause, and beating the devil's tattoo upon the table to keep himself awake.

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"Very," replied Mr. Sponge, wondering how such a thick-winded chap as Jog managed to partake of it.

"Fine (puff, wheeze) appetiser," observed Jogglebury, after another pause.

"It is," replied Mr. Sponge.

Presently Jog began to snore, and as the increasing melody of his nose gave little hopes of returning animation, Mr. Sponge had recourse to his old friend "Mogg," and amidst speculations as to time and distances, managed to finish the port. We will now pass to the next morning.

Whatever deficiency there might be at dinner was amply atoned for at breakfast, which was both good and abundant; bread and cake of all sorts, eggs, muffins, toast, honey, jellies, and preserves without end. On the side-table was a dish of hot kidneys and a magnificent red home-fed ham.

But a greater treat far, as Mrs. Jogglebury thought, was in the guests set around. There were arranged all her tulips in succession, beginning with that greatest of all wonders, Gustavus James, and running on with Anna Maria, Frederick John, Juliana Jane, Margaret Henrietta, Sarah Amelia, down to Peter William, the heir, who sat next his pa. These formed a close line on the side of the table opposite the fire, that side being left for Mr. Sponge. All the children had clean pinafores on, and their hairs plastered according to nursery regulation. Mr. Sponge's appearance was a signal for silence, and they all sat staring at him in mute astonishment.

Baby, Gustavus James, did more; for, after reconnoitring him through a sort of lattice window formed of his fingers, he whined out, "Who's that ogl-e-y man, ma?" amidst the titter of the rest of the line.

"*Hush!* my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Crowdey, hoping Mr. Sponge hadn't heard. But Gustavus James was not to be put down, and he renewed the charge as his mamma began pouring out the tea.

"Send that ogl-e-y man away, ma!" whined he, in a louder tone, at which all the children burst out a-laughing.

"Baby (puff), Gustavus! (wheeze)," exclaimed Jog, knocking

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

with the handle of his knife against the table, and frowning at the prodigy.

"Well, pa, he *is* a ogl-e-y man," replied the child, amid the ill-suppressed laughter of the rest.

"Ah, but what have *I* got!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, producing a gaudily done-up paper of comfits from his pocket, opening and distributing the unwholesome contents along the line, stopping the orator's mouth first with a great, red-daubed, almond comfit.

Breakfast was then proceeded with without further difficulty. As it drew to a close, and Mr. Sponge began nibbling at the sweets instead of continuing his attack on the solids, Mrs. Jogglebury began eyeing and telegraphing her husband.

"Jog, my dear," said she, looking significantly at him, and then at the egg-stand, which still contained three eggs.

"Well, my dear," replied Jog, with a vacant stare, pretending not to understand.

"You'd better eat them," said she, looking again at the eggs.

"I've (puff) breakfasted, my (wheeze) dear," replied Jog, pompously, wiping his mouth on his claret-coloured bandana.

"They'll be wasted if you don't," replied Mrs. Jog.

"Well, but they'll be wasted if I eat them without (wheeze) wanting them," rejoined he.

"Nonsense, Jog, you always say that," retorted his wife.

"Nonsense (puff), nonsense (wheeze), I say they *will*."

"I say they *won't*!" replied Mrs. Jog; "now will they, Mr. Sponge?" continued she, appealing to our friend.

"Why, no, not so much as if they went out," replied our friend, thinking Mrs. Jog was the one to side with.

"Then you'd better (puff, wheeze, gasp) eat them between you," replied Jog, getting up and strutting out of the room.

Presently he appeared in front of the house, crowned in a pea-green wide-awake, with a half-finished gibbey in his hand; and as Mr. Sponge did not want to offend him, and moreover wanted to get his horses billeted on him, he presently made an excuse for joining him.

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

Although his horses were standing "free gratis," as he called it, at Mr. Puffington's, and though he would have thought nothing of making Mr. Leather come over with one each hunting morning, still he felt that if the hounds were much on the other side of Puddingpote Bower, it would not be so convenient as having them there. Despite the egg controversy, he thought a judicious application of soft sauder might accomplish what he wanted. At all events, he would try.

Jog had brought himself short up, and was standing glowering with his hands in his coat-pockets, as if he had never seen the place before.

"Pretty look-out you have here, Mr. Jogglebury," observed Mr. Sponge, joining him.

"Very," replied Jog, still cogitating the egg question, and thinking he wouldn't have so many boiled the next day.

"All yours?" asked Sponge, waving his hand as he spoke.

"My (puff) ter-ri-tory goes up to those (wheeze) firs in the grass-field on the hill," replied Jogglebury, pompously.

"Indeed," said Mr. Sponge, "they are fine trees;" thinking what a finish they would make for a steeple-chase.

"My (puff) uncle, Crowdey, planted those (wheeze) trees," observed Jog. "I observe," added he, "that it is easier to cut down a (puff) tree than to make it (wheeze) again."

"I believe you're right," replied Mr. Sponge; "that idea has struck me very often."

"Has it?" replied Jog, puffing voluminously into his frill.

They then advanced a few paces, and, leaning on the iron hurdles, commenced staring at the cows.

"Where are the stables?" at last asked Sponge, seeing no inclination to move on the part of his host.

"Stables (wheeze)—stables (puff)," replied Jogglebury, recollecting Sponge's previous day's proposal—"stables (wheeze) are behind," said he, "at the back there (puff); nothin' to see at them (wheeze)."

"There'll be the horse you drove yesterday; won't you go to see how he is?" asked Mr. Sponge.

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"Oh, sure to be well (puff); never nothing the matter with him (wheeze)," replied Jogglebury.

"May as well see," rejoined Mr. Sponge, turning up a narrow walk that seemed to lead to the back.

Jog followed doggedly. He had a good deal of John Bull in him, and did not fancy being taken possession of in that sort of way; and thought, moreover, that Mr. Sponge had not behaved very well in the matter of the egg controversy.

The stables certainly were nothing to boast of. They were in an old rubble-stone, red-tiled building, without even the delicacy of a ceiling. Nevertheless, there was plenty of room even after Jogglebury had cut off one end for a cow-house.

"Why, you might hunt the country with all this stabling," observed Mr. Sponge, as he entered the low door. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Nine stalls, I declare," added he, after counting them.

"My (puff) uncle used to (wheeze) a good deal of his own (puff) land," replied Jogglebury.

"Ah, well, I'll tell you what: these stables will be much better for being occupied," observed Mr. Sponge. "And I'll tell you what I'll do for you."

"But they *are* occupied!" gasped Jogglebury, convulsively.

"Only half," replied Mr. Sponge; "or a quarter, I may say—not even that, indeed. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll have my horses over here, and you shall find them in straw in return for the manure, and just charge me for hay and corn at market price, you know. That'll make it all square and fair, and no obligation, you know. I hate obligations," added he, eyeing Jog's disconcerted face.

"Oh, but (puff, wheeze, gasp)—" exclaimed Jogglebury, reddening up—"I don't (puff) know that I can (gasp) that. I mean (puff) that this (wheeze) stable is all the (gasp) 'commodation I have; and if we had (puff) company, or (gasp) anything of that sort, I don't know where we should (wheeze) their horses," continued he. "Besides, I don't (puff, wheeze) know about the market price of (gasp) corn. My (wheeze) tenant, Tom Hayrick, at the (puff) farm on the

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

(wheeze) hill yonder, supplies me with the (puff) quantity I (wheeze) want, and we just (puff, wheeze, gasp) settle once a (puff) half-year, or so."

"Ah, I see," replied Mr. Sponge; "you mean to say you wouldn't know how to strike the average so as to say what I ought to pay."

"Just so," rejoined Mr. Jogglebury, jumping at the idea.

"Ah, well," said Mr. Sponge, in a tone of indifference; "it's no great odds,—it's no great odds,—more the name of the thing than anything else; one likes to be independent, you know—one likes to be independent; but as I sha'n't be with you long, I'll just put up with it for once—I'll just put up with it for once—and let you find me—and let you find me." So saying, he walked away, leaving Jogglebury petrified at his impudence.

"That husband of yours is a monstrous good fellow," observed Mr. Sponge to Mrs. Jogglebury, who he now met coming out with her tail; "he *will* insist on my having my horses over here—most liberal, handsome thing of him, I'm sure; and that reminds me, can you manage to put up my servant?"

"I daresay we can," replied Mrs. Jogglebury, thoughtfully. "He's not a very fine gentleman, is he?" asked she, knowing that servants were often more difficult to please than their masters.

"Oh, not at all," replied Sponge; "not at all—wouldn't suit me if he was—wouldn't suit me if he was."

Just then up waddled Jogglebury, puffing and wheezing like a stranded grampus; the idea having just struck him that he might get off on the plea of not having room for the servant.

"It's very unfortunate (wheeze)—that's to say, it never occurred to me (puff), but I quite forgot (gasp) that we haven't (wheeze) room for your (puff) servant."

"Ah, you are a good fellow," replied Mr. Sponge—"a devilish good fellow. I was just telling Mrs. Jogglebury—wasn't I, Mrs. Jogglebury?—what an excellent fellow you are, and how kind you'd been about the horses and corn, and all

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that sort of thing, when it occurred to me that it mightn't be convenient, p'r'aps, to put up a servant ; but your wife assures me that it will ; so that settles the matter, you know—that settles the matter, and I'll now send for the horses forthwith."

Jog was utterly disconcerted, and didn't know which way to turn for an excuse. Mrs. Jogglebury, though she would rather have been without the establishment, did not like to peril Gustavus James's prospects by appearing displeased ; so she smilingly said she would see and do what they could.

Mr. Sponge then procured a messenger to take a note to Hanby House, for Mr. Leather, and having written it, amused himself for a time with his cigars and his "Mogg" in his bedroom, and then turned out to see the stable got ready, and pick up any information about the hounds, or anything else, from anybody he could lay hold of. As luck would have it, he fell in with a groom travelling a horse to hunt with Sir Harry Scattercash's hounds, which, he said, met at Snobston Green, some eight or nine miles off, the next day, and whither Mr. Sponge decided on going.

Mr. Jogglebury's equanimity returning at dinner-time, Mr. Sponge was persuasive enough to induce him to accompany him, and it was finally arranged that Leather should go on with the horses, and Jog should drive Sponge to cover in the phe-a-ton.

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

A FAMILY BREAKFAST ON A HUNTING MORNING.



Gustavus James.

MRS. JOGGLEBURY CROWDEY was a good deal disconcerted at Gustavus James's irreverence to his intended godpapa, and did her best, both by promises and entreaties, to bring him to a more becoming state of mind. She promised him abundance of good things if he would astonish Mr. Sponge with some of his wonderful stories, and expatiated on Mr. Sponge's goodness in bringing him the nice comfits, though Mrs. Jogglebury could not but in her heart blame them for some little internal inconvenience the

wonder had experienced during the night. However, she brought him to breakfast in pretty good form, where he was cocked up in his high chair beside his mamma, the rest of the infantry occupying the position of the previous day, all under good-behaviour orders.

Unfortunately, Mr. Sponge, not having been able to get himself up to his satisfaction, was late in coming down; and when he did make his appearance, the unusual sight of a man in a red coat, a green tie, a blue vest, brown boots, &c., completely upset their propriety, and deranged the order of the young

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gentleman's performance. Mr. Sponge, too, conscious that he was late, was more eager for his breakfast than anxious to be astonished; so, what with repressing the demands of the youngster, watching that the others did not break loose, and getting Jog and Mr. Sponge what they wanted, Mrs. Crowdey had her hands full. At last, having got them set a-going, she took a lump of sugar out of the basin, and showing it to the wonder, laid it beside her plate, whispering, "Now, my beauty!" into his ear, as she adjusted him in his chair. The child, who had been wound up like a musical snuff-box, then went off as follows:—

"Bah, bah, back sheep, have 'ou any 'ool?
Ess, marry, have I, three bags full;
Un for ye master, un for ye dame,
Un for ye 'ittle boy 'ot 'uns about ye 'ane."

But, unfortunately, Mr. Sponge was busy with his breakfast, and the prodigy wasted his sweetness on the desert air.

Mrs. Jogglebury, who had sat listening in ecstasies, saw the offended eye and pouting lip of the boy, and attempted to make up with exclamations of "That *is* a clever fellow! That *is* a wonder!" at the same time showing him the sugar.

"A little more (puff) tea, my (wheeze) dear," said Jogglebury, thrusting his great cup up the table.

"*Hush!* Jog, *hush!*" exclaimed Mrs. Crowdey, holding up her forefinger, and looking significantly first at him, and then at the urchin.

"Now, 'Obin and Ichard,' my darling," continued she, addressing herself coaxingly to Gustavus James.

"No, *not* 'Obin and Ichard,'" replied the child, peevishly.

"Yes, my darling, *do*, that's a treasure."

"Well, *my* (puff) darling, give me some (wheeze) tea," interposed Jogglebury, knocking with his knuckles on the table.

"Oh dear, Jog, you and your tea!—you're always wanting tea," replied Mrs. Jogglebury, snappishly.

"Well, but my (puff) dear, you forget that Mr. (wheeze) Sponge and I have to be at (puff) Snobston Green at a (wheeze) quarter to eleven, and it's good twelve (gasp) miles off."

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"Well, but it'll not take you long to get there," replied Mrs. Jogglebury; "will it, Mr. Sponge?" continued she, again appealing to our friend.

"Sure I don't know," replied Sponge, eating away; "Mr. Crowdey finds conveyance—I only find company."

Mrs. Jogglebury Crowdey then prepared to pour her husband out another cup of tea, and the musical snuff-box, being now left to itself, went off of its own accord with—

"Diddle, diddle, doubt,
My candle's out,
My 'ittle dame's not at 'ome—
So saddle my hog, and bridle my dog,
And bring my 'ittle dame 'ome."

A poem that in the original *programme* was intended to come in after "Obin and Ichard," which was to be the *chef-d'œuvre*.

Mrs. Jog was delighted, and found herself pouring the tea into the sugar-basin instead of into Jog's cup.

Mr. Sponge, too, applauded. "Well, that *was* very clever," said he, filling his mouth with cold ham. "'Saddle my dog, and bridle my hog'—I'll trouble you for another cup of tea," addressing Mrs. Crowdey.

"No, not 'saddle my dog,' *sil-l-e-y man!*" drawled the child, making a pet lip; "'saddle my hog.'"

"Oh! 'saddle my hog,' was it?" replied Mr. Sponge, with apparent surprise; "I thought it was 'saddle my dog.' I'll trouble you for the sugar, Mrs. Jogglebury;" adding, "you have devilish good cream here; how many cows have you?"

"Cows (puff), cows (wheeze)?" replied Jogglebury; "how many cows?" repeated he.

"Oh, *two*," replied Mrs. Jogglebury, tartly, vexed at the interruption.

"Pardon me (puff)," replied Jogglebury, slowly and solemnly, with a full blow into his frill; "pardon me, Mrs. (puff) Jogglebury (wheeze) Crowdey, but there are *three* (wheeze)."

"*Not in milk*, Jog—*not in milk*," retorted Mrs. Crowdey.

"Three cows, Mrs. (puff) Jogglebury (wheeze) Crowdey, notwithstanding," rejoined our host.

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"Well; but when people talk of cream, and ask how many cows you have, they mean in milk, *Mister Jogglebury Crowdey*."

"Not necessarily, *Mistress Jogglebury Crowdey*," replied the pertinacious Jog, with another heavy snort.

"Ah, now you're coming your fine poor-law guardian knowledge," rejoined his wife. Jog was chairman of the Stir-it-stiff Union.

While this was going on, young hopeful was sitting cocked up in his high chair, evidently mortified at the want of attention.

Mrs. Crowdey saw how things were going, and, turning from the cow question, endeavoured to re-engage him in his recitations.

"Now, my angel!" exclaimed she, again showing him the sugar; "tell us about 'Obin and Ichard.'"

"No—not 'Obin and Ichard,'" pouted the child.

"O yes, my sweet, *do*, that's a good child; the gentleman in the pretty coat, who gives baby the nice things, wants to hear it."

"Come, out with it, young man!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, now putting a large piece of cold beef into his mouth.

"Not a 'ung man," muttered the child, bursting out a-crying, and extending his little fat arms to his mamma.

"No, my angel, not a 'ung man yet," replied Mrs. Jogglebury, taking him out of the chair, and hugging him to her bosom.

"He'll be a man before his mother for all that," observed Mr. Sponge, nothing disconcerted by the noise.

Jog had now finished his breakfast, and having pocketed three buns and two pieces of toast, with a thick layer of cold ham between them, looked at his great warming-pan of a watch, and said to his guest, "When you're (wheeze), I'm (puff)." So saying, he got up, and gave his great legs one or two convulsive shakes, as if to see that they were on.

Mrs. Jogglebury looked reproachfully at him, as much as to say, "How *can* you behave so?"

Mr. Sponge, as he eyed Jog's ill-made, queerly put on garments, wished that he had not desired Leather to go to the meet. It would have been better to have got the horses a little way off, and have shirked Jog, who did not look like a desirable introducer to a hunting field.

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"I'll be with you directly," replied Mr. Sponge, gulping down the remains of his tea; adding, "I've just got to run upstairs and get a cigar." So saying he jumped up and disappeared.

Murry Ann, not approving of Sponge's smoking in his bedroom, had hid the cigar-case under the toilet cover, at the back of the glass, and it was some time before he found it.

Mrs. Jogglebury availed herself of the lapse of time, and his absence, to pacify her young Turk, and try to coax him into reciting the marvellous "Obin and Ichard."

As Mr. Sponge came clanking downstairs with the cigar-case in his hand, she met him (accidentally, of course) at the bottom, with the boy in her arms, and exclaimed, "O Mr. Sponge, here's Gustavus James wants to tell you a little story."

Mr. Sponge stopped—inwardly hoping that it would not be a long one.

"Now, my darling," said she, sticking the boy up straight, to get him to begin.

"*Now then!*" exclaimed Mr. Crowdey, in the true Jehu-like style, from the vehicle at the door, in which he had composed himself.

"Coming, Jog! coming!" replied Mrs. Crowdey with a frown on her brow at the untimely interruption; then appealing again to the child, who was nestling in his mother's bosom, as if disinclined to show off, she said, "Now, my darling, let the gentleman hear how nicely you'll say it."

The child still slunk.

"That's a fine fellow, *out with it!*" said Mr. Sponge, taking up his hat to be off.

"Now then!" exclaimed his host again.

"Coming!" replied Mr. Sponge.

As if to thwart him the child then began, Mrs. Jogglebury holding up her forefinger as well in admiration as to keep silence:—

"Obin and Ichard, two pretty men,
Lay in bed till 'e clock struck ten;
Up starts Obin, and looks at the sky——"

And then the brat stopped.

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"Very beautiful!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge; "very beautiful! One of Moore's, isn't it? Thank you, my little dear, thank you," added he, chucking him under the chin, and putting on his hat to be off.

"O, but stop, Mr. Sponge!" exclaimed Mrs. Jogglebury, "you haven't heard it all—there's more yet."

Then turning to the child, she thus attempted to give him the cue.

"O, ho! Bother——"

"Now then! time's *hup!*" again shouted Jogglebury into the passage.

"O dear, Mr. Jogglebury, will you hold your stoopid tongue!" exclaimed she; adding, "you certainly are the most tiresome man under the sun." She then turned to the child with—

"O ho! Bother Ichard" again.

But the child was mute, and Mr. Sponge fearing, from some indistinct growlings that proceeded from the carriage, that a storm was brewing, endeavoured to cut short the entertainment by exclaiming—

"Wonderful two-year-old! Pity he's not in the Darby. Daresay he'll tell me the rest when I come back."

But this only added fuel to the fire of Mrs. Jogglebury's ardour, and made her more anxious that Sponge should not lose a word of it. Accordingly she gave the fat dumpling another jerk up on her arm, and repeated—

"O ho! Bother Ichard, the——What's very high?" asked Mrs. Jogglebury, coaxingly.

"Sun's very high,"

replied the child.

"Yes, my darling!" exclaimed the delighted mamma.

Mrs. Jogglebury then proceeded with—

"Ou go before——"

Child.—"With bottle and bag,"

Mamma.—"And I'll follow after——"

Child.—"With 'ittle Jack Nag."

"Well, now, that is wonderful!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge,

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hurrying on his dogskin gloves, and wishing both Obin and Ichard further.

"*Isn't it !*" exclaimed Mrs. Jogglebury, in ecstasies ; then addressing the child, she said, "Now that *is* a good boy—that *is* a fine fellow. Now couldn't he say it all over by himself, doesn't he think?" Mrs. Jogglebury looking at Mr. Sponge, as if she was meditating the richest possible treat for him.

"Oh," replied Mr. Sponge, quite tired of the detention, "he'll tell me it when I return—he'll tell me it when I return," at the same time giving the child another parting chuck under the chin. But the child was not to be put off in that way, and instead of crouching, and nestling, and hiding its face, it looked up quite boldly, and after a little hesitation went through "Obin and Ichard," to the delight of Mrs. Jogglebury, the mortification of Sponge, and the growling denunciations of old Jog, who still kept his place in the vehicle. Mr. Sponge could not but stay the poem out.

At last they got started, Jog driving, Sponge occupying the low seat, Jog's flail and Sponge's cane whip-stick stuck in the straps of the apron. Jog was very crusty at first, and did little but whip and flog the old horse, and puff and growl about being late, keeping people waiting, over-driving the horse, and so on.

"Have a cigar?" at last asked Sponge, opening the well-filled case, and tendering that olive-branch to his companion.

"Cigar (wheeze), cigar (puff)?" replied Jog, eyeing the case ; "why, no, p'r'aps not, I think (wheeze), thank'e."

"Do you never smoke?" asked Sponge.

"(Puff—wheeze) Not often," replied Jogglebury, looking about him with an air of indifference. He did not like to say no, because Springwheat smoked, though Mrs. Springey highly disapproved of it.

"You'll find them very mild," observed Sponge, taking one out for himself, and again tendering the case to his friend.

"Mild (wheeze), mild (puff), are they?" said Jog, thinking he would try one.

Mr. Sponge then struck a light, and, getting his own cigar well under way, lit one for his friend, and presented it to him.

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They then went puffing, and whipping, and smoking in silence. Jog spoke first.

"*I am going to be (puff) sick,*" observed he, slowly and solemnly.

"Hope not," replied Mr. Sponge, with a hearty whiff up into the air.

"*I am going to be (puff) sick,*" observed Jog, after another pause.

"Be sick on your own side, then," replied Sponge, with another hearty whiff.

"By the (puff) powers! *I am (puff) sick!*" exclaimed Jogglebury, after another pause, and throwing away the cigar. "Oh, dear!" exclaimed he, "you shouldn't have given me that nasty (puff) thing."

"My dear fellow, I didn't know it would make you sick," replied Mr. Sponge.

"Well, but (puff) if they (wheeze) other people sick, in all probability they'll (wheeze) me. *There!*" exclaimed he, pulling up again.

The delays occasioned by these catastrophes, together with the time lost by "Obin and Ichard," threw our sportsmen out considerably. When they reached Chalkerley Gate it wanted ten minutes to eleven, and they had still three miles to go.

"We shall be late," observed Sponge, inwardly denouncing "Obin and Ichard."

"Shouldn't wonder," replied Jog, adding, with a puff into his frill, "consequence of making *me* sick, you see."

"My dear fellow, if you don't know your own stomach by this time, you ought to do," replied Mr. Sponge.

"I (puff) flatter myself I *do* (wheeze) my own stomach," replied Jogglebury, tartly.

They then rumbled on for some time in silence.

When they came within sight of Snobston Green, the coast was clear. Not a red coat, or hunting indication of any sort, was to be seen.

"I told you so (puff)!" growled Jog, blowing full into his frill, and pulling up short.

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"They be gone to Hackberry Dean," said an old man, breaking stones by the roadside.

"Hackberry Dean (puff)—Hackberry Dean (wheeze)!" replied Jog, thoughtfully; "then we must (puff) by Tollarton Mill, and through the (wheeze) village to Stewley?"

"Y-e-a-z," drawled the man.

Jog then drove on a few paces, and turned up a lane to the left, whose finger-post directed the road "to Tollarton." He seemed less disconcerted than Sponge, who kept inwardly anathematising, not only "Obin and Ichard," but "Diddle, diddle, doubt"—"Bah, bah, black sheep"—the whole tribe of nursery ballads, in short.

The fact was, Jog wanted to be into Hackberry Dean, which was full of fine, straight hollies, fit either for gibbeys or whipsticks, and the hounds being there gave him the *entrée*. It was for helping himself there, without this excuse, that he had been "county courted," and he did not care to renew his acquaintance with the judge. He now whipped and jagged the old nag, as if intent on catching the hounds. Mr. Sponge liberated his whip from the apron-straps, and lent a hand when Jog began to flag. So they rattled and jingled away at an amended pace. Still it seemed to Mr. Sponge as if they would never get there. Having passed through Tollarton, and cleared the village of Stewley, Mr. Sponge strained his eyes in every direction where there was a bit of wood, in hopes of seeing something of the hounds. Meanwhile Jog was shuffling his little axe from below the cushion of the driving-seat into the pocket of his great-coat. All of a sudden he pulled up, as they were passing a bank of wood (Hackberry Dean), and handing the reins to his companion, said—

"Just lay hold for a minute whilst I (puff) out."

"What's happened?" asked Sponge. "Not sick again, are you?"

"No (puff), not exactly (wheeze) sick, but I want to be out all the (puff) same."

So saying, out he bundled, and crushing through the fern-grown woodbiney fence, darted into the wood in a way that

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astonished our hero. Presently the chop, chop, chop of the axe revealed the mystery.

"By the powers, the fool's at his sticks!" exclaimed Sponge, disgusted at the *contretemps*. "Mister Jogglebury!" roared he, "Mister Jogglebury, we shall never catch up the hounds at this rate!"

But Jog was deaf—*chop, chop, chop* was all the answer Mr. Sponge got.

"Well, hang me if ever I saw such a fellow!" continued Sponge, thinking he would drive on if he only knew the way.

"*Chop, chop, chop,*" continued the axe.

"Mister Jogglebury! Mister Jogglebury Crowdey *a-hooi!*" roared Sponge, at the top of his voice.

The axe stopped. "Anybody comin'?" resounded from the wood.

"*You come,*" replied Mr. Sponge.

"Presently," was the answer; and the *chop, chop, chopping* was resumed.

"The man's mad," muttered Mr. Sponge, throwing himself back in the seat.

At length Jog appeared brushing and tearing his way out of the wood, with two fine hollies under his arm. He was running down with perspiration, and looked anxiously up and down the road as he blundered through the fence to see if there was any one coming.

"I really think (puff) this will make a four-in-hander (wheeze)," exclaimed he, as he advanced towards the carriage, holding a holly so as to show its full length—"not that I (puff, wheeze, gasp) do much in that (puff, wheeze) line, but really it is such a (puff, wheeze) beauty that I couldn't (puff, wheeze, gasp) resist it."

"Well, but I thought we were going to hunt," observed Mr. Sponge, drily.

"Hunt (puff)! so we are (wheeze); but there are no hounds (gasp). My good (puff) man," continued he, addressing a smock-frocked countryman, who now came up, "have you seen anything of the (wheeze) hounds?"



MR. JOGGLEBURY CROWDEY ON HIS HOBBY.

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"E-e-s," replied the man. "They be gone to Brookdale Plantin'."

"Then we'd better (puff) after them," said Jog, running the stick through the apron-straps, and bundling into the phaeton with the long one in his hand.

Away they rattled and jingled as before.

"How far is it?" asked Mr. Sponge, vexed at the detention.

"Oh (puff) close by (wheeze)," replied Jog.

"Close by," as most of our sporting readers well know to their cost, is generally anything but close by. Nor was Jog's close by, close by on this occasion.

"There," said Jog, after they had got crawled up Trampington Hill; "that's it (puff) to the right, by the (wheeze) water there," pointing to a plantation about a mile off, with a pond shining at the end.

Just as Mr. Sponge caught view of the water, the twang of a horn was heard, and the hounds came pouring, full cry, out of cover, followed by about twenty variously-clad horsemen, and our friend had the satisfaction of seeing them run clean out of sight, over as fine a country as ever was crossed. Worst of all, he thought he saw Leather pounding away on the chestnut.



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CHAPTER XLIX.

HUNTING THE HOUNDS.



RAMPINGTON HILL, whose summit they had just reached as the hounds broke cover, commanded an extensive view over the adjoining vale, and as Mr. Sponge sat shading his eyes with his hands from a bright wintry sun, he thought he saw them come to a check, and afterwards bend to the left.

"I really think," said he, addressing his still perspiring companion, "that if you were to make for that road on the left" (pointing one out as seen between the low hedge-rows in the distance) "we might catch them up yet."

"Left (puff), left (wheeze)?" replied Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey, staring about with anything but the quickness that marked his movements when he dived into Hackberry Dean.

"Don't you see," asked Sponge, tartly, "there's a road by the corn-stacks yonder?" pointing them out.

"I see," replied Jogglebury, blowing freely into his shirt-frill. "I see," repeated he, staring that way; "but I think (puff) that's a mere (wheeze) occupation road, leading to (gasp) nowhere."

"Never mind, let's try!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, giving the rein a jerk, to get the horse into motion again; adding, "it's no use sitting here, you know, like a couple of fools, when the hounds are running."

"Couple of (puff)!" growled Jog, not liking the appellation, and wishing to be home with the long holly. "I don't see anything (wheeze) foolish in the (puff) business."

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"*There they are!*" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, who had kept his eye on the spot he last viewed them, and now saw the horse-men titt-up-ing across a grass field in the easy way that distance makes very uneasy riding look. "*Cut along!*" exclaimed he, laying into the horse's hind-quarters with his hunting-whip.

"*Don't!* the horse is (puff) tired," retorted Jog, angrily, holding the horse instead of letting him go to Sponge's salute.

"Not a bit on't!" exclaimed Sponge; "fresh as paint! Spring him a bit, that's a good fellow!" added he.

Jog didn't fancy being dictated to in this way, and just crawled along at his own pace, some six miles an hour, his dull phlegmatic face contrasting with the eager excitement of Mr. Sponge's countenance. If it had not been that Jog wanted to see that Leather did not play any tricks with his horse, he would not have gone a yard to please Mr. Sponge. Jog might, however, have been easy on that score, for Leather had just buckled the curb-rein of the horse's bridle round a tree in the plantations where they found, and the animal, being used to this sort of work, had fallen-to quite contentedly upon the grass within reach.

Bilkington Pike now appeared in view, and Jog drew in as he spied it. He knew the damage: sixpence for carriages, and he doubted that Sponge would pay it.

"It's no use going any (wheeze) further," observed he, drawing up into a walk, as he eyed the red-brick gable end of the toll-house, and the formidable white gate across the road.

Tom Coppers had heard the hounds, and, knowing the hurry sportsmen are often in, had taken the precaution to lock the gate.

"Just a *leetle* further!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, soothingly, whose anxiety in looking after the hounds had prevented his seeing this formidable impediment. "If you would just drive up to that farm-house on the hill," pointing to one about half a mile off, "I think we should be able to decide whether it's worth going on or not."

"Well (puff), well (wheeze), well (gasp)," pondered Jogglebury,

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still staring at the gate, "if you (puff) think it's worth (wheeze) while going through the (gasp) gate," nodding towards it as he spoke.

"Oh, never mind the gate," replied Mr. Sponge, with an ostentatious dive into his breeches pocket, as if he was going to pay it.

He kept his hand in his pocket till he came close up to the gate, when, suddenly drawing it out, he said—

"Oh, hang it! I've left my purse at home; Never mind, drive on," said he to his host; exclaiming to the man, "it's Mr. Crowdey's carriage—Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey's carriage! Mr. Crowdey, the chairman of the Stir-it-stiff Poor-Law Union!"

"*Sixpence!*" shouted the man, following the phaeton with outstretched hand.

"Ord, hang it (puff)! I could have done that (wheeze)," growled Jogglebury, pulling up.

"You harn't got no ticket," said Coppers, coming up, "and ain't a-goin' to not never no meetin' o' trustees, are you?" asked he, seeing the importance of the person with whom he had to deal;—a trustee of that and other roads, and one who always availed himself of his privilege of going to the meetings toll-free.

"No," replied Jog, pompously handing Sponge the whip and reins.

He then rose deliberately from his seat, and slowly unbuttoned each particular button of the brown great-coat he had over the tight black hunting one. He then unbuttoned the black, and next the right-hand pocket of the white mole-skins, in which he carried his money. He then deliberately fished up his green-and-gold purse, a *souvenir* of Miss Smiler (the plaintiff in the breach of promise action, Smiler *v.* Jogglebury), and holding it with both hands before his eyes, to see which end contained the silver, he slowly drew the slide, and took out a shilling, though there were plenty of sixpences in.

This gave the man an errand into the toll-house to get one,

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and, by way of marking his attention, when he returned he said, in the negative way that country people put a question—

“You'll not need a ticket, will you?”

“Ticket (puff) ticket (wheeze)?” repeated Jog, thoughtfully.

“Yes, I'll take a ticket,” said he.

“Oh, hang it, no,” replied Sponge; “let's get on!” stamping against the bottom of the phaeton to set the horse a-going.

“Costs nothin’,” observed Jog, drily, drawing the reins, as the man again returned to the gate-house.

A considerable delay then took place; first, Pikey had to find his glasses, as he called his spectacles, to look out a one-horse-chaise ticket. Then he had to look out the tickets, when he found he had all sorts except a one-horse-chaise one ready—waggons, hearses, mourning-coaches, saddle-horses, chaises and pair, mules, asses, every sort but the one that was wanted. Well, then he had to fill one up, and to do this he had, first, to find the ink-horn, and then a pen that would “mark,” so that, altogether, a delay took place that would have been peculiarly edifying to a Kennington Common or Lambeth gate-keeper to witness.

But it was not all over yet. Having got the ticket, Jog examined it, minutely, to see that it was all right, then held it to his nose to smell it, and ultimately drew the purse-slide, and deposited it among the sovereigns. He then restored that expensive trophy to his pocket, shook his leg, to send it down, then buttoned the pocket, and took the tight black coat with both hands and dragged it across his chest, so as to get his stomach in. He then gasped and held his breath, making himself as small as possible, while he coaxed the buttons into the holes; and that difficult process being at length accomplished, he stood still awhile, to take breath after the exertion. Then he began to rebutton the easy, brown great-coat, going deliberately up the whole series, from the small button below, to keep the laps together, up to the one on the neck, or where the neck would have been if Jog had not been all stomach up to the chin. He then soused himself into his seat, and, snorting heavily through his nostrils, took the reins and whip and long

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holly from Mr. Sponge, and drove leisurely on. Sponge sat anathematising his slowness.

When they reached the farm-house on the hill the hounds were fairly in view. The huntsman was casting them, and the horsemen were grouped about as usual, while the lagers were stealing quietly up the lanes and by-roads, thinking nobody would see them. Save the whites or the greys, our friends in the "chay" were not sufficiently near to descry the colours of the horses; but Mr. Sponge could not help thinking that he recognised the outline of the wicked chestnut, Multum in Parvo.

"By the powers, but if it is him," muttered he to himself, clenching his fist and grinding his teeth as he spoke; "but I'll—I'll—I'll make *such* an example of you," meaning of Leather.

Mr. Sponge could not exactly say what he would do, for it was by no means a settled point whether Leather or he were master. But to the hounds. If it had not been for Mr. Sponge's shabbiness at the turnpike-gate, we really believe he might now have caught them up, for the road to them was down hill all the way, and the impetus of the vehicle would have sent the old screw along. That delay, however, was fatal. Before they had gone a quarter of the distance the hounds suddenly struck the scent at a hedge-row, and, with heads up and sterns down, went straight away at a pace that annihilated all hope. They were out of sight in a minute. It was clearly a case of kill.

"Well, there's a go!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, folding his arms, and throwing himself back in the phaeton in disgust. "I think I never saw such a mess as we've made this morning."

And he looked at the stick in the apron, and the long holly between Jog's legs, and longed to lay them about his great back.

"Well (puff), I s'pose (wheeze) we may as well (puff) home now?" observed Jog, looking about him quite unconcernedly.

"I *think* so," snapped Sponge; adding, "we've *done* it for once, at all events."

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The observation, however, was lost upon Jog, whose mind was occupied with thinking how to get the phaeton round without upsetting. The road was narrow at best, and the newly-laid stone-heaps had encroached upon its bounds. He first tried to back between two stone-heaps, but only succeeded in running a wheel into one; he then tried the forward tack, with no better success, till Mr. Sponge, seeing matters were getting worse, just jumped out, and taking the old horse by the head, executed the manœuvre that Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey first attempted. They then commenced retracing their steps, rather a long trail, even for people in an amiable mood, but a terribly long one for disagreeing ones.

Jog, to be sure, was pretty comfortable. He had got all he wanted—all he went out a-hunting for; and as he hissed and jerked the old horse along, he kept casting an eye at the contents of the apron, thinking what crowned, or great man's head, the now rough, club-headed knobs should be fashioned to represent; and indulged in speculations as to their prospective worth and possible destination. He had not the slightest doubt that a thousand sticks to each of his children would be as good as a couple of thousand pounds a-piece; sometimes he thought more, but never less. Mr. Sponge, on the other hand, brooded over the loss of the run; indulged in all sorts of speculations as to the splendour of the affair; pictured the figure he would have cut on the chestnut, and the price he might have got for him in the field. Then he thought of the bucketing Leather would give him; the way he would ram him at everything; how he would let him go with a slack rein in the deep—very likely making him over-reach—nay, there was no saying but he might stake him.

Then he thought over all the misfortunes and mishaps of the day. The unpropitious *toilet*; the aggravation of "Obin and Ichard;" the delay caused by Jog being sick with his cigar; the divergence into Hackberry Dean; and the long protracted wait at the toll-bar. Reviewing all the circumstances fairly and dispassionately, Mr. Sponge came to the determination of having nothing more to do with Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey in

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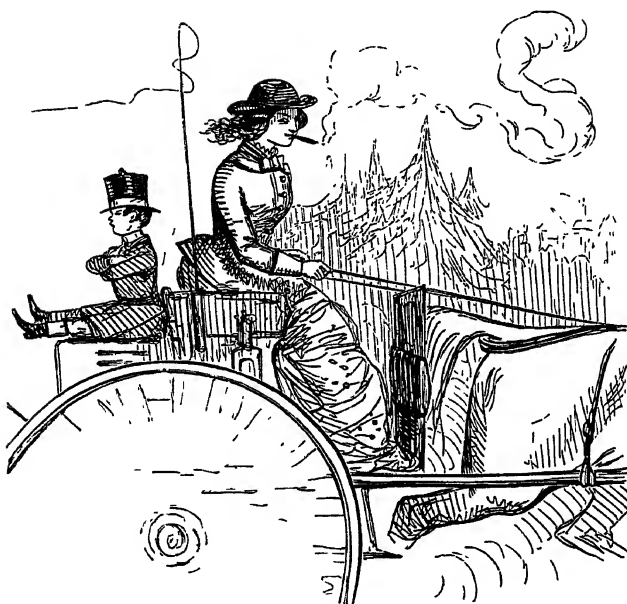
the hunting way. These, or similar cogitations and resolutions were, at length, interrupted by their arriving at home, as denoted by an outburst of children rushing from the lodge to receive them—Gustavus James, in his nurse's arms, bringing up the rear, to whom our friend could hardly raise the semblance of a smile.

It was all that little brat ! thought he.

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CHAPTER L.

COUNTRY QUARTERS.



Lady Scattercash.

SIR HARRY SCATTERCASH'S were only an ill-supported pack of hounds; they were not kept upon any fixed principles. We do not mean to say that they had not plenty to eat, but their management was only of the scrim-

maging order. Sir Harry was, what is technically called, "going it." Like our noble friend, Lord Hardup, now Earl of Scamperdale, he had worked through the morning of life without knowing what it was to be troubled with money; but, unlike his lordship, now that he had unexpectedly come into some, he seemed bent upon trying how fast he could get through it. In this laudable endeavour he was ably assisted by Lady Scattercash, late the lovely and elegant Miss Spangles, of the "Theatre Royal,

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Sadler's Wells." Sir Harry had married her before his wind-fall made him a baronet, having, at the time, some intention of trying his luck on the stage, but he always declared that he never regretted his choice; on the contrary, he said, if he had gone among the "duchesses," he could not have suited himself better. Lady Scattercash could ride—indeed, she used to do scenes in the circle (two horses and a flag)—and she could drive, and smoke, and sing, and was possessed of many other accomplishments. Sir Harry would sometimes drink straight on end for a week, and then not taste wine again for a month; sometimes the hounds hunted, and sometimes they did not; sometimes they were advertised, and sometimes they were not; sometimes they went out on one day, and sometimes on another; sometimes they were fixed to be at such a place, and went to quite a different one. When Sir Harry was on a drinking-bout, they were shut up altogether; and the huntsman, Tom Watchorn, late of the "Camberwell and Balham Hill Union Harriers," an early acquaintance of Miss Spangles—indeed, some said he was her uncle—used to go away on a drinking excursion too. Altogether, they were what the country people called a very "promiscuous set." The hounds were of all sorts and sizes; the horses of no particular stamp; and the men scamps and vagabonds of the first class.

With such a master and such an establishment, we need hardly say that no stranger ever came into the country for the purpose of hunting. Sir Harry's fields were entirely composed of his own choice "set," and a few farmers, and people whom he could abuse and do what he liked with. Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey, to be sure, had mentioned Sir Harry approvingly, when he went to Mr. Puffington's, to inveigle Mr. Sponge over to Puddingpote Bower; but what might suit Mr. Jogglebury, who went out to seek gibbey sticks, might not suit a person who went out for the purpose of hunting a fox in order to show off and sell his horses. In fact, Puddingpote Bower was an exceedingly bad hunting quarter, as things turned out. Sir Harry Scattercash, having had the run described in our two preceding chapters, and having just imported a few of the

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"sock-and-buskin" sort from town, was not likely to be going out again for a time; while Mr. Puffington finding where Mr. Sponge had taken refuge, determined not to meet within reach of Puddingpote Bower, if he could possibly help it; and Lord Scamperdale was almost always beyond distance, unless horse and rider lay out over-night—a proceeding always deprecated by prudent sportsmen. Mr. Sponge, therefore, got more of Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey's company than he wanted, and Mr. Crowdey got more of Mr. Sponge's than he desired. In vain Jog took him up into his attics and his closets, and his various holes and corners, and showed him his enormous crop of sticks—some tied in sheaves, like corn; some put up more sparingly; and others, again, wrapped in silver paper, with their valuable heads enveloped in old gloves. Jog would untie the strings of these, and placing the heads in the most favourable position before our friend, just as an artist would a portrait, question him as to whom he thought they were.

"There, now (puff)," said he, holding up one that he thought there could be no mistake about; "who do you (wheeze) that is?"

"Deaf Burke," replied Mr. Sponge, after a stare.

"*Deaf Burke!* (puff)," replied Jog, indignantly.

"Who is it, then?" asked Mr. Sponge.

"Can't you *see*? (wheeze)," replied Jog, tartly.

"No," replied Sponge, after another examination. "It's not Scroggins, is it?"

"Napoleon (puff) Bonaparte," replied Jog, with great dignity, returning the head to the glove.

He showed several others, with little better success, Mr. Sponge seeming rather to take a pleasure in finding ridiculous likenesses, instead of helping his host out in his conceits. The stick-mania was a failure, as far as Mr. Sponge was concerned. Neither were the peregrinations about the farms, or ter-ri-to-ry, as Jog called his estate, more successful; a man's estate, like his children, being seldom of much interest to any but himself.

Jog and Sponge were soon most heartily sick of each other. Nor did Mrs. Jog's charms, nor the voluble enunciation of

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"Obin and Ichard," followed by "Bah, bah, black sheep," &c., from that wonderful boy, Gustavus James, mend matters; for the young rogue having been in Mr. Sponge's room while Murry Ann was doing it out, had torn the back off Sponge's "Mogg," and made such a mess of his tooth-brush, by cleaning his shoes with it, as never was seen.

Mr. Sponge soon began to think it was not worth while staying at Puddingpote Bower for the mere sake of his keep, seeing there was no hunting to be had from it, and it did not do to keep hack hunters idle, especially in open weather. Leather and he, for once, were of the same opinion, and that worthy shook his head, and said Mr. Crowdey was "awful mean," at the same time pulling out a sample of bad ship oats, that he had got from a neighbouring ostler, to show the "stuff" their "'osses" were a-eatin' of. The fact was, Jog's beer was nothing like so strong as Mr. Puffington's; added to which, Mr. Crowdey carried the principles of the poor-law union into his own establishment, and dieted his servants upon certain rules. Sunday, roast beef, potatoes and pudding under the meat; Monday, fried beef, and stick-jaw (as they profanely called a certain pudding); Wednesday, leg of mutton and so on. The allowance of beer was a pint and a half per diem to Bartholomew, and a pint to each woman; and Mr. Crowdey used to observe from the head of the servants' dinner-table on the arrival of each cargo, "Now this (puff) beer is to (wheeze) a month, and, if you choose to drink it in a (gasp) day, you'll go without any for the rest of the (wheeze) time;" an intimation that had a very favourable effect upon the tap. Mr. Leather, however, did not like it. "Puffington's servants," he said, "had beer whenever they chose," and he thought it "awful mean" restricting the quantity. Mr. Jog, however, was not to be moved. Thus time crawled heavily on.

Mr. and Mrs. Jog had a long confab one night on the expediency of getting rid of Mr. Sponge. Mrs. Jog wanted to keep him on till after the christening; while Jog combated her reasons by representing the improbability of its doing Gustavus James any good having him for a godpapa, seeing Sponge's age,

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and the probability of his marrying himself. Mrs. Jog, however, was very determined; rather too much so, indeed, for she awakened Jog's jealousy, who lay tossing and tumbling about all through the night.

He was up very early, and as Mrs. Jog was falling into a comfortable nap, she was aroused by his well-known voice hallooing as loud as he could in the middle of the entrance-passage.

"BARTHOLO-*me-e-w*!" the last syllable being pronounced or prolonged like the mew of a cat.

"BARTHOLO-*me-e-w*!" repeated he, not getting an answer to the first shout.

"MURRY ANN!" shouted he, after another pause.

"MURRY ANN!" exclaimed he, still louder.

Just then, the iron latch of a door at the top of the house opened, and a female voice exclaimed hurriedly over the banisters—

"Yes, sir! here, sir! comin', sir! comin'!"

"Oh, Murry Ann (puff) that's (wheeze) you, is it?" asked Jog, still speaking at the top of his voice.

"Yes, sir," replied Mary Ann.

"Oh! then, Murry Ann, I wanted to (puff)—that you'd better get the (puff) breakfast ready early. I think Mr. (gasp)—Sponge will be (wheezing) away to-day."

"Yes, sir," replied Mary Ann.

All this was said in such a tone as could not fail to be heard all over the house; certainly into Mr. Sponge's room which was midway between the speakers.

What prevented Mr. Sponge wheezing away, will appear in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER LI.

SIR HARRY SCATTERCASH'S HOUNDS.



The Nonsuch Courier.

THE reason Mr. Sponge did not take his departure, after the pretty intelligible hint given by his host, was, that as he was passing his shilling army razor over his soapy chin, he saw a stockingless lad, in a purple coat and faded hunting-cap, making his way up to the house, at a pace that betokened more than ordinary vagrancy. It was the kennel, stable, and servants' hall courier of Nonsuch House, come to

say that Sir Harry hunted that day.

Presently Mr. Leather knocked at Mr. Sponge's bedroom door, and, being invited in, announced the fact.

"Sir 'Arry's 'ounds 'unt," said he, twisting the door handle as he spoke.

"What time?" asked Mr. Sponge, with his half-shaven face turned towards him.

"Meet at eleven," replied Leather.

"Where?" inquired Mr. Sponge.

"Nonsuch House, 'bout nine miles off."

It *was* thirteen, but Mr. Leather heard the malt liquor was good, and wanted to taste it.

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"Take on the brown, then," said Mr. Sponge, quite pompously; "and tell Bartholomew to have the hack at the door at ten—or say a quarter to. Tell him, I'll lick him for every minute he's late; and, mind, don't let old Rorey O'More here know," meaning our friend Jog, "or he may take a fancy to go, and we shall never get there," alluding to their former excursion.

"No, no," replied Mr. Leather, leaving the room.

Mr. Sponge then arrayed himself in his hunting costume—scarlet coat, green tie, blue vest, gosling coloured cords, and brown tops; and was greeted with a round of applause from the little Jogs as he entered the breakfast-room. Gustavus James would handle him; and, considering that his paws were all over raspberry jam, our friend would as soon have dispensed with his attentions. Mrs. Jog was all smiles, and Jog all scowls.

A little after ten our friend, cigar in mouth, was in the saddle. Mrs. Jog, with Gustavus James in her arms, and all the children clustering about, stood in the passage to see him start, and watch the capers and caprioles of the piebald, as he ambled down the avenue.

"Nine miles—nine miles," muttered Mr. Sponge to himself, as he passed through the Lodge and turned up the Quarryburn Road; "do it in an hour well enough," said he, sticking spurs into the hack, and cantering away.

Having kept this pace up for about five miles, till he thought from the view he had taken of the map it was about time to be turning, he hailed a blacksmith in his shop, who, next to saddlers, are generally the most intelligent people about hounds, and asked how far it was to Sir Harry's?

"Eight miles," replied the man, in a minute.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge. "It was only nine at starting, and I've come I don't know how many."

The next person Mr. Sponge met told him it was ten miles; the third, after asking him where he had come from, said he was a stranger in the country, and had never heard of the place; and, what with Mr. Leather's original misstatement,



MR. SPONGE STARTING FROM THE BOWER.

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misdirections from other people, and mistakes of his own, it was more good luck than good management that got Mr. Sponge to Nonsuch House in time.

The fact was, the whole hunt was knocked up in a hurry. Sir Harry, and the choice spirits by whom he was surrounded, had not finished celebrating the triumphs of the Snobston Green day, and as it was not likely that the hounds would be out again soon, the people of the hunting establishment were taking their ease. Watchorn had gone to be entertained at a public supper given by the poachers and fox-stealers of the village of Bark-shot, as a "mark of respect for his abilities as a sportsman and his integrity as a man," meaning his indifference to his master's interests; while the first whip had gone to visit his aunt, and the groom was away negotiating the exchange of a cow. With things in this state, Wily Tom of Tinklerhatch, a noted fox-stealer in Lord Scamperdale's country, had arrived with a great thundering dog fox, stolen from his lordship's cover near the cross roads at Dallington Burn, which being communicated to our friends about midnight in the smoking room at Nonsuch House, it was resolved to hunt him forthwith, especially as one of the guests, Mr. Orlando Bugles, of the Surrey Theatre, was obliged to return to town immediately, and, as he sometimes enacted the part of Squire Tallyho, it was thought a little of the reality might correct the Tom and Jerry style in which he did it. Accordingly, orders were issued for a hunt, notwithstanding the hounds were fed and the horses watered. Sir Harry didn't "care a rap; let them go as fast as they could."

All these circumstances conspired to make them late; added to which, when Watchorn, the huntsman, cast up, which he did on a higgler's horse, he found the only sound one in his stud had gone to the neighbouring town to get some fiddlers—her ladyship having determined to compliment Mr. Bugles' visit by a quadrille party. Bugles and she were old friends. When Mr. Sponge cast up at half-past eleven, things were still behindhand.

Sir Harry and party had had a wet night of it, and were all



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more or less drunk. They had kept up the excitement with a champagne breakfast and various liqueurs, to say nothing of cigars. They were a sad debauched-looking set, some of them scarcely out of their teens, with pallid cheeks, trembling hands, sunken eyes, and all the symptoms of premature decay. Others—the sock-and-buskin ones—were a made-up, wigged, and padded set. Bugles was resplendent. He had on a dress scarlet coat, lined and faced with yellow satin (one of the properties, we believe, of the Victoria), a beautifully worked pink shirt-front, a pitch-plaster coloured waistcoat, white ducks, and jack-boots, with brass heel spurs. He carried his whip in the arm's-length-way of a circus master following a horse. Some dozen of these curiosities were staggering, and swaggering, and smoking in front of Nonsuch House, to the edification of a lot of gaping grooms and chawbacons, when Mr. Sponge cantered becomingly up on the piebald. Lady Scattercash, with several elegantly-dressed females, all with cigars in their mouths, were conversing with them from the open drawing-room windows above, while sundry good-looking damsels ogled them from the attics above. Such was the *tableau* that presented itself to Mr. Sponge as he cantered round the turn that brought him in front of the Elizabethan mansion of Nonsuch House.

Sir Harry, who was still rather drunk, thinking that every person there must be either one of his party, or a friend of one of his party, or a neighbour, or some one that he had seen before, reeled up to our friend as he stopped, and, shaking him heartily by the hand, asked him to come in and have something to eat. This was a godsend to Mr. Sponge, who accepted the proffered hand most readily, shaking it in a way that quite satisfied Sir Harry he was right in some one or other of his conjectures. Bugles, and all the reeling, swaggering bucks, looked respectfully at the well-appointed man, and Bugles determined to have a pair of nut-brown tops as soon as ever he got back to town.

Sir Harry was a tall, wan, pale young man, with a strong tendency to *delirium tremens*; that, and consumption, appeared to be running a match for his person. He was a harum-scarum fellow, all strings, and tapes, and ends, and flue. He looked as

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if he slept in his clothes. His hat was fastened on with a ribbon, or rather a ribbon passed round near the band, in order to fasten it on, for it was seldom or ever applied to the purpose, and the ends generally went flying out behind like a Chinaman's tail. Then his flashy, many-coloured cravats stared and straggled in all directions, while his untied waistcoat-strings protruded between the laps of his old short-waisted swallow-tailed scarlet, mixing in glorious confusion with those of his breeches behind. The knee-strings were generally also loose; the web straps of his boots were seldom in; and, what with one set of strings and another, he had acquired the name of Sixteen-string'd Jack. Mr. Sponge having dismounted, and given his hack to the now half-drunken Leather, followed Sir Harry through a foil and four-in-hand whip-hung hall to the deserted breakfast-room, where chairs stood in all directions, and crumpled napkins strewed the floor. The litter of eggs, and remnants of muffins, and diminished piles of toast, and broken bread and empty toast racks, and cups and saucers, and half-emptied glasses, and wholly emptied champagne bottles, were scattered up and down a disorderly table, further littered with newspapers, letter backs, County Court summonses, mustard pots, anchovies, pickles—all the odds and ends of a most miscellaneous meal. The side-table exhibited cold joints, game, poultry, lukewarm hashed venison, and sundry lamp-lit dishes of savoury grills.

“Here you are!” exclaimed Sir Harry, taking his hunting-whip and sweeping the contents of one end of the table on to the floor with a crash that brought in the butler and some theatrical-looking servants.

“Take those filthy things away! (hiccup),” exclaimed Sir Harry, crushing the broken china smaller under his heels; “and (hiccup) bring some red-herrings and soda-water. What the deuce does the (hiccup) cook mean by not (hiccuping) things as he ought? Now,” said he, addressing Mr. Sponge, and raking the plates and dishes up to him with the handle of his whip, just as a gaming-table keeper rakes up the stakes—“now,” said he, “make your (hiccup) game. There'll be some

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hot (hiccup) in directly." He meant to say "tea," but the word failed him.

Mr. Sponge fell to with avidity. He was always ready to eat, and attacked first one thing and then another, as though he had not had any breakfast at Puddingpote Bower.

Sir Harry remained mute for some minutes, sitting cross-legged and backwards in his chair, with his throbbing temples resting upon the back, wondering where it was that he had met Mr. Sponge. He looked different without his hat; and, though he saw it was no one he knew particularly, he could not help thinking he had seen him before.

Indeed, he thought it was clear, from Mr. Sponge's manner, that they had met, and he was just going to ask him whether it was at Offley's or the Coal Hole, when a sudden move outside attracted his attention. It was the hounds.

The huntsman's horse having at length returned from the fiddler hunt, and being whiped over, and made tolerably decent, Mr. Watchorn, having exchanged the postillion saddle in which it had been ridden for a horn-cased hunting one, had mounted, and opening the kennel-door, had liberated the pent-up pack, who came tearing out full cry and spread themselves over the country, regardless alike of the *twang, twang, twang* of the horn and the furious onslaught of a couple of stable lads in scarlet and caps, who, true to the title of "whippers-in," let drive at all they could get within reach of. The hounds had not been out, even to exercise, since the Snobston-Green day, and were as wild as hawks. They were ready to run anything. Furious and Furrier tackled with a cow. Bountiful ran a black cart-colt, and made him leap the haw-haw. Sempstress, Singwell, and Saladin (puppies), went after some crows. Mercury took after the stable cat, while old Thunderer and Come-by-chance (supposed to be one of Lord Scamperdale's) joined in pursuit of a cur. Watchorn, however, did not care for these little ebullitions of spirit, and never having been accustomed to exercise the "Camberwell and Balham Hill Union Harriers," he did not see any occasion for troubling the fox-hounds. "They would soon saddle," he said, "when they got a scent."

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It was this riotous start that diverted Sixteen-string'd Jack's attention from our friend, and, looking out of the window, Mr. Sponge saw all the company preparing to be off. There was the elegant Bugles mounting her ladyship's white Arab; the brothers Spangles climbing on to their cream-colours; Mr. This getting on to the postman's pony, and Mr. That on to the gamekeeper's. Mr. Sponge hurried out to get to the brown ere his anger arose at being left behind, and provoked a scene. He only just arrived in time; for the twang of the horn, the cracks of the whips, the clamorous rates of the servants, the yelping of the hounds, and the general commotion, had got up his courage, and he launched out in such a way, when Mr. Sponge mounted, as would have shot a loose rider into the air. As it was, Mr. Sponge grappled manfully with him, and, letting the Latchfords into his sides, shoved him in front of the throng, as if nothing had happened. Mr. Leather then slunk back to the stable, to get out the hack to have a hunt in the distance.

The hounds, as we said before, were desperately wild; but at length, by dint of coaxing and cracking, and whooping and hallooing, they got some ten couple out of the five-and-twenty gathered together, and Mr. Watchorn, putting himself at their head, trotted briskly on, blowing most lustily, in the hopes that the rest would follow. So he clattered along the avenue, formed between rows of sombre-headed firs and sweeping spruce, out of which whirled clouds of pheasants, and scuttling rabbits and stupid hares kept crossing and recrossing, to the derangement of Mr. Watchorn's temper and the detriment of the unsteady pack. Squeak, squeak, squeal, sounded right and left, followed sometimes by the heavy retributive hand of Justice on the offenders' hides, and sometimes by the snarl, snap, and worry of a couple of hounds contending for the prey. *Twang, twang, twang*, still went the horn; and when the huntsman reached the unicorn-crested gates, between tea-caddy looking lodges, he found himself in possession of a clear majority of his unsizeable pack. Some were rather bloody to be sure, and a few carried scraps of game, which fastidious masters would as



"LET MR. BUGLES THROUGH."

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

soon have seen them without; but neither Sir Harry nor his huntsman cared about appearances.

On clearing the lodges, and passing about a quarter of a mile on the Hardington Road, hedge-rows ceased, and they came upon Farleyfair Downs, across which Mr. Watchorn now struck, making for a square plantation, near the first hill-top, where it had been arranged the bag-fox should be shook. It was a fine day, rather brighter, perhaps, than sportsmen like, and there was a crispness in the air indicative of frost, but then there is generally a burning scent just before one. So thought Mr. Watchorn, as he turned his feverish face up to the bright blue sky, imbibing the fine fresh air of the wide-extending downs, instead of the stale tobacco smoke of the fetid beer-shop. As he trotted over the springy sward, up the gently rising ground, he rose in his stirrups; and laying hold of his horse's mane, turned to survey the long-drawn, lagging field behind.

"You'll have to look sharp, my hearties," said he to himself, as he run them over in his eye, and thought there might be twenty or five-and-twenty horsemen; "you'll have to look sharp, my hearties," said he, "if you mean to get away, for Wily Tom has his hat on the ground, which shows he has put him down, and if he's the sort of gem'man I expect he'll not be long in cover."

So saying, he resumed his seat in the saddle, and easing his horse, endeavoured by sundry dog noises—such as, "*Yooi doit, Ravager!*" "*Gently, Paragon!*" "*Here again, Mercury!*"—to restrain the ardour of the leading hounds, so as to let the rebellious tail ones up and go into cover with something like a body. This was rather a difficult task to accomplish, for those with him being light, and consequently anxious to be doing and ready for riot, were difficult to restrain from dashing forward; while those that had taken their diversion and refreshment among the game, were easy whether they did anything more or not.

While Watchorn was thus manœuvring his forces Wily Tom beckoned him on, and old Cruiser and Marmion, who had

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often been at the game before, and knew what Wily Tom's hat on the ground meant, flew to him full cry, drawing all their companions after them.

"I think he's away to the west," said Tom, in an undertone, resting his hand on Watchorn's horse's shoulder; "*back home*," added he, jerking his head with a knowing leer of his roguish eye.

"They're on him!" exclaimed he after a pause, as the outburst of melody proclaimed that the hounds had crossed his line. Then there was such racing and striving among the field to get up, and such squeezing and crowding, and "Mind, my horse kicks!" at the little white hunting wicket leading into cover. "Knock down the wall!" exclaimed one. "Get out of the way; I'll ride over it!" roared another. "We shall be here all day!" vociferated a third. "That's a header!" cried another, as a clatter of stones was followed by a pair of white breeches summersetting in the air with a horse underneath. "It's Tom Sawbones, the doctor!" exclaimed one, "and he can mend himself." "By Jove! but he's killed!" shrieked another. "Not a bit of it," added a third, as the dead man rose and ran after his horse. "Let Mr. Bugles through," cried Sir Harry, seeing his friend, or rather his wife's friend, was fretting the Arab.

Meanwhile the melody of hounds increased, and each man, as he got through the little gate, rose in his stirrups and hustled his horse along the green ride to catch up those on before. The plantation was about twenty acres, rather thick and briary at the bottom; and Master Reynard, finding it was pretty safe, and, moreover, having attempted to break just by where some chawbacons were ploughing, had headed short back, so that when the excited field rushed through the parallel gate on the far side of the plantation, expecting to see the pack streaming away over the downs, they found most of the hounds with their heads in the air, some looking for halloos, others watching their companions trying to carry the scent over the fallow.

Watchorn galloped up in the frantic state half-witted huntsmen generally are, and one of the impromptu whips being in

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attendance, got quickly round the hounds, and commenced a series of assaults upon them that very soon sent them scuttling to Mr. Watchorn for safety. If they had been at the hares again, or even worrying sheep, he could not have rated or flogged more severely.

“MARKSMAN! MARKSMAN! *ough, ye old Divil, get to him!*” roared the whip, aiming a stinging cut with his heavy knotty-pointed whip at a venerable sage who still snuffed down a furrow to satisfy himself the fox was not on before he returned to cover—an exertion that overbalanced the whip, and would have landed him on the ground, had not he caught by the spur in the old mare’s flank. Then he went on scrambling and rating after Marksman, the field exclaiming, as the Edmonton people did by Johnny Gilpin—

“He’s on! no, he’s off, he hangs by the mane!”

At last he got shuffled back into the saddle, and the cry of hounds in cover attracting the outsiders back, the scene quickly changed, and the horsemen were again over head in wood. They now swept up the grass ride to the exposed part of the higher ground, the trees gradually diminishing in size, till, on reaching the top, they did not come much above a horse’s shoulder. This point commanded a fine view over the adjacent country. Behind, was the rich vale of Dairylow, with its villages and spires, and trees and inclosures, while in front was nothing but the undulating, wide-stretching downs, reaching to the soft grey hills in the distance. There was not, however, much time for contemplating scenery; for Wily Tom, who had stolen to this point immediately the hounds took up the scent, now viewed the fox stealing over a gap in the wall, and, the field catching sight, there was such a hullabaloo as would have made a more composed and orderly-minded fox think it better to break instead of running the outside of the wall as this one intended to do. What wind there was swept over the downs; and putting himself straight to catch it, he went away whisking his brush in the air, as if he was fresh out of his kennel instead of a sack. Then what a commotion there was! Such jumpings

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off to lead down, such huggings and holdings, and wooa-ings of those that sat on, such slidings and scramblings, and loosening and rollings of stones. Then the frantic horses began to bound, and the frightened riders to exclaim—

“Do get out of my way, sir!”

“*Mind, sir!* I’m a-top of you!”

“Give him his head and let him go!” exclaimed the still drunken brother Bob Spangles, sliding his horse down with a slack rein.

“That’s your sort!” roared Sir Harry, and just as he said it, his horse dropped on his hind-quarters like a rabbit, landing Sir Harry comfortably on his feet, amid the roars of the foot-people, and the mirth of such of the horsemen as were not too frightened to laugh.

“I think I’ll stay where I am,” observed Mr. Bugles, preparing for a bird’s-eye view where he was. “This hunting,” said he, getting off the fidgety Arab, “seems dangerous.”

The parties who accomplished the descent had now some fine plain sailing for their trouble. The line lay across the open downs, composed of sound, springy, racing-like turf, extremely well adapted for trying the pace either of horses or hounds. And very soon it did try the pace of them, for they had not gone above a mile before there was very considerable tailing with both. To be sure they had never been very well together, but still the line lengthened instead of contracting. Horses that could hardly be held down hill, and that applied themselves to the turf on landing as if they could never have enough of it, now began to bear upon the rein and hang back to those behind; while the hounds came straggling along like a flock of wild geese, with full half a mile between the leader and the last. However, they all threw their tongues, and each man flattered himself that the hound he was with was the first. In vain the galloping Watchorn looked back and tootled his horn; in vain he worked with his cap; in vain the whips rode at the tail hounds, cursing and swearing, and vowing they would cut them in two.

There was no getting them together. Every now and then

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the fox might be seen, looking about the size of a marble, as he rounded some distant hill, each succeeding view making him less, till, at last, he seemed no bigger than a pea.

Five-and-twenty minutes best pace over downs is calculated to try the mettle of anything; and, long before the leading hounds reached Cockthrottle Dean, the field was choked by the pace. Sir Harry had long been tailed off; both the brothers Spangles had dropped astern; the horse of one had dropped too; Sawbones, the doctor's, had got a stiff neck; Willing, the road surveyor, and Mr. Lavender, the grocer, pulled up together. Muddyman, the farmer's, four-year-old had enough at the end of ten minutes; both the whips tired theirs in a quarter of an hour; and in less than twenty minutes Watchorn and Sponge were alone in their glory, or rather Sponge was in his glory, for Watchorn's horse was beat.

"Lend me your horn!" exclaimed Sponge, as he heard by the hammer and pincering of Watchorn's horse it was all U P with him.

The horse stopped as if shot; and getting the horn, Mr. Sponge went on, the brown laying himself out as if still full of running. Cockthrottle Dean was now close at hand, and in all probability the fox would not leave it. So thought Mr. Sponge as he dived into it, astonished at the chorus and echo of the hounds.

"*Tally-ho!*" shouted a countryman on the opposite side; and the road Sponge had taken being favourable to the point, he made for it at a hand-gallop, horn in hand, to blow as soon as he got there.

"He's away!" cried the man as soon as our friend appeared; "*reet* 'cross tornops!" added he, pointing with his hoe.

Mr. Sponge then put his horse's head that way, and blew a long shrill reverberating blast. As he paused to take breath and listen, he heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and presently a stentorian voice, half frantic with rage, exclaimed from behind—

"WHO THE DICKENS ARE YOU?"

"*Who the Dickens are you?*" retorted Mr. Sponge, without looking round.



"HE'S AWAY!—REET 'CROSS TORNOPS."

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"They commonly call me the EARL OF SCAMPERDALE," roared the same sweet voice, "and those are my hounds."

"*They're not your hounds!*" snapped Mr. Sponge, now looking round on his big-spectacled, flat-hatted lordship, who was closely followed by his *double*, Mr. Spraggon.

"*Not my hounds!*" screeched his lordship. "Oh, ye barber's apprentice! Oh, ye draper's assistant! Oh, ye *unmitigated* Mahomedon! Sing out, Jack! sing out! For heaven's sake, sing out!" added he, throwing out his arms in perfect despair.

"Not his lordship's hounds!" roared Jack, now rising in his stirrups and brandishing his big whip. "Not his lordship's hounds! Tell me *that*, when they cost him five-and-twenty 'underd—two thousand five 'underd a year! Oh, by Jingo, but that's a pretty go! If they're not his lordship's hounds, I should like to know whose they are?" and thereupon Jack wiped the foam from his mouth on his sleeve.

"Sir Harry's!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, again putting the horn to his lips, and blowing another shrill blast.

"*Sir Harry's!*" screeched his lordship in disgust, for he hated the very sound of his name—"Sir Harry's! Oh, you rusty-booted ruffian! Tell me that to my very face!"

"Sir Harry's!" repeated Jack, again standing erect in his stirrups. "What! impeach his lordship's integrity—oh, by Jove, there's an end of everything! Death before dishonour! Slugs in a saw-pit! Pistols and coffee for two! Cock-pheasant at Weybridge, six o'clock i' the mornin'!" And Jack, sinking exhausted on his saddle, again wiped the foam from his mouth.

His lordship then went at Sponge again.

"Oh, you sanctified, putrified, pestilential, perpendicular, gingerbread-booted, counter-skippin' snob, you think because I'm a lord, and can't swear or use coarse language, that you may do what you like; but I'll let you see the contrary," said he, brandishing his brother to Jack's whip. "Mark you, sir, I'll fight you, sir, any non-huntin' day you like, sir, 'cept Sunday."

Just then the clatter and blowing of horses was heard, and Frostyface emerged from the wood followed by the hounds, who, swinging themselves "forrard" over the turnips, hit off

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the scent and went away full cry, followed by his lordship and Jack, leaving Mr. Sponge transfixed with astonishment.

"Changed foxes," at length said Sponge, with a shake of his head; and just then the cry of hounds on the opposite bank confirmed his conjecture, and he got to Sir Harry's in time to take up his lordship's fox.

His lordship's hounds ran into Sir Harry's fox about two miles farther on, but the hounds would not break him up; and, on examining him, he was found to have been aniseeded; and, worst of all, by the mark on his ear, to be one that they had turned down themselves the season before, being one of a litter that Sly had stolen from Sir Harry's cover at Seedeysgorse—a beautiful instance of retributive justice.

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CHAPTER LII.

FARMER PEASTRAW'S DINÉ-MATINEE.



HERE are pleasanter situations than being left alone with twenty couple of even the best-mannered fox-hounds; far pleasanter situations than being left alone with such a tearing, frantic lot as composed Sir Harry Scattercash's pack. Sportsmen are so used (with some hounds, at least) to see foxes "in hand" that they never think there is any difficulty in getting them there; and it is only a single-handed combat with the pack that shows them that the hound does not bring the fox up in his mouth like a retriever. A tyro's first *tête-à-tête* with a half-killed fox, with the baying pack circling round, must leave as pleasing a *souvenir* on the memory as Mr. Gordon Cumming would derive from his first interview with a lion.

Our friend Mr. Sponge was now engaged with a game of "pull devil, pull baker," with the hounds for the fox, the difficulty of his situation being heightened by having to contend with the impetuous temper of a high-couraged, dangerous horse. To be sure, the gallant Hercules was a good deal subdued by the distance and severity of the pace, but there are few horses that get to the end of a run that have not sufficient kick left in them to do mischief to hounds, especially when raised or frightened by the smell of blood; nevertheless, there was no help for it. Mr. Sponge knew, that unless he carried off some trophy, it would never be believed he had killed the fox. Considering all this, and also that there was no one to tell what damage he did, he just rode slap into the middle of the pack, as Marksman,

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Furious, Thunderer, and Bountiful, were in the act of despatching the fox, Singwell and Saladin (puppies) having been sent away howling, the one bit through the jowl, the other through the foot.

"*Ah! leave him—leave him—leave him!*" screeched Mr. Sponge, trampling over Warrior and Tempest, the brown horse lashing out furiously at Melody and Lapwing. "*Ah, leave him! leave him!*" repeated he, throwing himself off his horse by the fox, and clearing a circle with his whip, aided by the hoofs of the animal. There lay the fox before him killed, but as yet little broken by the pack. He was a noble fellow; bright and brown, in the full vigour of life and condition, with a gameness even in death that no other animal shows. Mr. Sponge put his foot on the body and quickly whipped off his brush. Before he had time to pocket it, the repulsed pack poured in upon him and carried off the carcass.

"Ah! dash ye, you may have *that*," said he, cutting at them with his whip as they clustered upon it like a swarm of bees. They had not had a wild fox for five weeks.

"*Who-hoop!*" cried Mr. Sponge, in the hope of attracting some of the field. "*WHO-HOOP!*" repeated he, as loud as he could halloo. "Where can they all be, I wonder?" said he, looking around; and echo answered—*where?*

The hounds had now crunched their fox, or as much of him as they wanted. Old Marksman ran about with his head, and Warrior with a haunch.

"*Drop it, you old beggar!*" cried Mr. Sponge, cutting at Marksman with his whip, and Mr. Sponge being too near to make a trial of speed prudent, the old dog did as he was bid, and slunk away.

Our friend then appended this proud trophy to his saddle-flap by a piece of whipcord, and, mounting the now tractable Hercules, began to cast about in search of a landmark. Like most down countries, this one was somewhat deceptive; there were plenty of landmarks, but they were all of the same sort—clumps of trees on hill-tops, and plantations on hill-sides, but

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nothing of a distinguishing character, nothing that a stranger could say, "I remember seeing that as I came;" or, "I remember passing that in the run." The landscape seemed all alike: north, south, east, and west, equally indifferent.

"Curse the thing," said Mr. Sponge, adjusting himself in his saddle, and looking about; "I haven't the *slightest* idea where I am. I'll blow the horn, and see if that will bring any one."

So saying, he applied the horn to his lips, and blew a keen, shrill blast, that spread over the surrounding country, and was echoed back by the distant hills. A few lost hounds cast up from various quarters, in the unexpected way that hounds do come to a horn. Among them were a few branded with S,* who did not at all set off the beauty of the rest.

"'Ord rot you, you belong to that old ruffian, do you?" said Mr. Sponge, riding and cutting at one with his whip, exclaiming, "Get away to him, ye beggar, or I'll tuck you up short."

He now, for the first time, saw them together in anything like numbers, and was struck with the queerness and inequality of the whole. They were of all sorts and sizes, from the solemn towering calf-like fox-hound down to the little wriggling harrier. They seemed, too, to be troubled with various complaints and infirmities. Some had the mange, some had bleary eyes; some had but one; many were out at the elbows; and not a few down at the toes. However, they had killed a fox, and "Handsome is that handsome does," said Mr. Sponge, as, with his horse surrounded by them, he moved on in quest of his way home.

At first, he thought to retrace his steps by the marks of his horse's hoofs, and succeeded in getting back to the dean, where Sir Harry's hounds changed foxes with Lord Scamperdale's; but he got confused with the imprints of the other horses, and very soon had to trust entirely to chance. Chance, we are sorry to say, did not befriend him; for, after wandering over the wide-extending downs, he came upon the little hamlet of Tinkler Hatch, and was informed that he had been riding in

* "S," for Scamperdale, showing they were his lordship's.

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a semicircle. He there got some gruel for his horse, and with day closing in, now set off as directed, on the Ribchester Road, with the assurance that he "couldn't miss his way." Some of the hounds here declined following him any further, and slunk into cottages and outhouses as they passed along. Mr. Sponge, however, did not care for their company.

Having travelled musingly along two or three miles of road, now thinking over the glorious run—now of the gallant way in which Hercules had carried him—now of the pity it was that there was nobody there to see—now of the encounter with Lord Scamperdale, just as he passed a well-filled stack-yard, that had shut out the view of a flaming red-brick house with a pea-green door and windows, an outburst of "*hoo-rays!*" followed by one cheer more—" *hooo-ray!*" made the remaining wild hounds prick up their ears, and our friend rein in his horse. to hear what was "up." A bright fire in a room on the right of the door overpowered the clouds of tobacco-smoke with which the room was enveloped, and revealed sundry scarlet coats in the full glow of joyous hilarity. It was Sir Harry and friends recruiting at Farmer Peastraw's after their exertions; for, though they could not make much of hunting, they were always ready to drink. They were having a rare set-to—rashers of bacon, wedges of cheese, with oceans of malt liquor. It was the appearance of a magnificent cold round of home-fed beef, red with saltpetre and flaky with white fat, borne on high by their host, that elicited the applause and the one cheer more that broke on Mr. Sponge's ear as he was passing—applause that was renewed as they caught a glimpse of his red coat, not on account of his safety or that of the hounds, but simply because being in the cheering mood, they were ready to cheer anything.

"*Hil-loo!* there's Mr. What's-his-name?" exclaimed brother Bob Spangles, as he caught view of Sponge and the hounds passing the window.

"So there is!" roared another; "*Hoo-ray!*"

"*Hoo-ray!*" yelled two or three more.

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"Stop him!" cried another.

"Call him in," roared Sir Harry, "and let's liquor him."

"Hilloo! Mister *What's-your-name!*" exclaimed the other Spangles, throwing up the window. "Hilloo! won't you come in and have some refreshment?"

"Who's there?" asked Mr. Sponge, reining in the brown.

"Oh, we're all here," shouted brother Bob Spangles, holding up a tumbler of hot brandy and water; "we're all here—Sir Harry and all," added he.

"But what shall I do with the hounds?" asked Mr. Sponge, looking down upon the confused pack, now crowding about his horse's head.

"Oh, let the beef-eaters—the scene-shifters—I meant to say the servants—those fellows, you know, in scarlet and black caps, look after them," replied brother Bob Spangles.

"But there are none of them here," exclaimed Mr. Sponge, looking back on the deserted road.

"None of them here!" hiccuped Sir Harry, who had now got reeled to the window. "None of them here," repeated he, staring vacantly at the uneven pack. "Oh (hiccup), I'll tell you what do—(hiccup) them into a barn or a stable, or a (hiccup) of any sort, and we'll send for them when we want to (hiccup) again."

"Then just you call them to you," replied Sponge, thinking they would go to their master. "Just you call them," repeated he, "and I'll put them to you."

"(Hiccup) call to them?" replied Sir Harry; "I can't (hiccup)."

"Oh, yes!" rejoined Mr. Sponge; "call one or two by their names, and the rest will follow."

"Names! (hiccup) I don't know any of their nasty names," replied Sir Harry, staring wildly.

"Towler! Towler! Towler! here, good dog—*hoop!*—here's your liquor!" cried brother Bob Spangles, holding the smoking tumbler of brandy and water out of the window, as if to tempt any hound that chose to answer to the name of Towler.



SIR HARRY OF NONSUCH HOUSE.

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There didn't seem to be a Towler in the pack ; at least, none of them qualified for the brandy and water.

" Oh, I'll (hiccup) you what we'll do," exclaimed Sir Harry ; " I'll (hiccup) you what we'll do. We'll just give them a (hiccup) kick a-piece, and send them (hiccuping) home," Sir Harry, reeling back into the room to the black horse-hair sofa, where his whip was.

He presently appeared at the door, and going into the midst of the hounds, commenced laying about him, rating, and cutting, and kicking, and shouting.

" *Geete* away home with ye, ye brutes ; what are you all (hiccup)ing here about ? *Ah ! cut off his tail !*" cried he, staggering after a venerable blear-eyed sage, who dropped his stern and took off.

" *Be off !* Does your mother know you're out ?" cried Bob Spangles, out of the window, to old Marksman, who stood wondering what to do.

The old hound took the hint also.

" Now then, old feller," cried Sir Harry, staggering up to Mr. Sponge, who still sat on his horse, in mute astonishment at Sir Harry's mode of dealing with his hounds. " Now then, old feller," said he, seizing Mr. Sponge by the hand, " get rid of your quadruped, and (hiccup) in, and make yourself ' o'er all the (hiccups) of life victorious,' as Bob Spangles says, when he (hiccups) it neat. This is old (hiccup) Peastraw's, a (hiccup) tenant of mine, and he'll be most (hiccup) to see you."

" But what must I do with my horse ?" asked Mr. Sponge, rubbing some of the dried sweat off the brown's shoulder as he spoke ; adding, " I should like to get him a feed of corn."

" Give him some ale, and a (hiccup) of sherry in it," replied Sir Harry ; " it'll do him far more good—make his mane grow, smoothing the horse's thin, silky mane as he spoke.

" Well, I'll put him up," replied Mr. Sponge, " and then come to you," throwing himself, jockey fashion, off the horse as he spoke.

" That's a (hiccup) feller," said Sir Harry ; adding, " here's old Pea himself come to see after you."

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So saying, Sir Harry reeled back to his comrades in the house, leaving Mr. Sponge in the care of the farmer.

"This way, sir; this way," said the burly Mr. Peastraw, leading the way into his farmyard, where a line of hunters stood shivering under a long cart-shed.

"But I can't put my horse in here," observed Mr. Sponge, looking at the unfortunate brutes.

"No, sir, no," replied Mr. Peastraw; "put yours in a stable, sir; put yours in a stable;" adding, "these young gents don't care much about their horses."

"Does anybody know the chap's name?" asked Sir Harry, reeling back into the room.

"Know his name!" exclaimed Bob Spangles; "why, don't you?"

"No," replied Sir Harry, with a vacant stare.

"Why, you went up and shook hands with him, as if you were as thick as thieves," replied Bob.

"Did I?" hiccuped Sir Harry. "Well, I thought I knew him. At least, I thought it was somebody I had (hiccup)ed before; and at one's own (hiccup) house, you know, one's 'bliged to be (hiccup) feller well (hiccup) with everybody that comes. But, surely, some of you know his (hiccup) name," added he, looking about at the company.

"I think I know his (hiccup) face," replied Bob Spangles, imitating his brother-in-law.

"I've seen him somewhere," observed the other Spangles, through a mouthful of beef.

"So have I," exclaimed some one else, "but where I can't say."

"Most likely at church," observed brother Bob Spangles.

"Well, I don't think he'll corrupt me," observed Captain Quod, speaking between the fumes of a cigar.

"He'll not borrow much of me," observed Captain Seedybuck, producing a much tarnished green purse, and exhibiting two fourpenny-pieces at one end, and three-halfpence at the other.

"Oh, I daresay he's a good feller," observed Sir Harry; "I make no doubt he's one of the right sort."

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Just then in came the man himself, hat and whip in hand, waving the brush proudly over his head.

"Ah, that's (hiccup) right, old feller," exclaimed Sir Harry, again advancing with extended hand to meet him; adding, "you'd (hiccup) all you wanted for your (hiccup) horse: mutton broth—I mean barley-water, foot-bath, everything right. Let me introduce my (hiccup) brother-in-law, Bob Spangles, my (hiccup) friend Captain Ladofwax, Captain Quod, Captain (hiccup) Bouncey, Captain (hiccup) Seedybuck, and my (hiccup) brother-in-law, Mr. Spangles, as lushy a cove as ever was seen; ar'n't you, old boy?" added he, grasping the latter by the arm.

All these gentlemen severally bobbed their heads as Sir Harry called them over, and then resumed their respective occupations—eating, drinking, and smoking.

These were some of the debauched gentlemen Mr. Sponge had seen before Nonsuch House in the morning. They were all captains, or captains by courtesy. Ladofwax had been a painter and glazier in the Borough, where he made the acquaintance of Captain Quod, while that gentleman was an inmate of Captain Hudson's strong house. Captain Bouncey was the too well-known betting-office keeper; and Seedybuck was such a constant customer of Mr. Commissioner Fonblanque's court, that that worthy legal luminary, on discharging him for the fifth time, said to him, with a very significant shake of the head, "You'd better not come here again, sir." Seedybuck, being of the same opinion, had since fastened himself on to Sir Harry Scattercash, who found him in meat, drink, washing, and lodging. They were all attired in red coats, of one sort or another, though some of them were of a very antediluvian, and others of a very dressing-gown cut. Bouncey's had a hare on the button, and Seedybuck's coat sat on him like a sack. Still a scarlet coat is a scarlet coat in the eyes of some, and the coats were not a bit more unsportsmanlike than the men. To Mr. Sponge's astonishment, instead of breaking out in inquiries as to where they had run to, the time, the distance, who was up, who was down, and so on, they began recommending the

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victuals and drink; and this, notwithstanding Mr. Sponge kept flourishing the brush.

"We've had a rare run," said he, addressing himself to Sir Harry.

"Have you (hiccup)? I'm glad of it (hiccup). Pray have something to (hiccup) after it; you *must* be (hiccup)."

"Let me help you to some of this cold round of beef!" exclaimed Captain Bouncey, brandishing the great broad-bladed carving-knife.

"Have a slice of 'ot 'am," suggested Captain Quod.

"The *finest* run I ever rode!" observed Mr. Sponge, still endeavouring to get a hearing.

"Daresay it would," replied Sir Harry; "those (hiccup) hounds of mine are uncommon (hiccup)." He didn't know what they were, and the hiccup came very opportunely.

"The pace was terrific!" exclaimed Sponge.

"Daresay it would," replied Sir Harry; "and that's what makes me (hiccup) you're so (hiccup). Pea, here, has some rare old October—(hiccup) bushels to the (hiccup) hogshead."

"It's capital!" exclaimed Captain Seedybuck, frothing himself a tumblerful out of the tall brown jug.

"So is this," rejoined Captain Quod, pouring himself out a liberal allowance of gin.

"That horse of mine carried me *MAGnificently*!" observed Mr. Sponge, with a commanding emphasis on the *MAG*.

"Daresay he would," replied Sir Harry; "he looked like a (hiccup)er—a white 'un, wasn't he?"

"No; a *brown*," replied Mr. Sponge, disgusted at the mistake.

"Ah, well; but there *was* somebody on a white," replied Sir Harry. "Oh,—ah—yes,—it was old Bugles on my lady's horse. By the (hiccup) way (hiccup), gentlemen, what's got Mr. Orlando (hiccup) Bugles?" asked Sir Harry, staring wildly round.

"Oh! old Bugles! old Pad-the-Hoof! old Mr. Funker! the horse frightened him so, that he went home crying," replied Bob Spangles.

"Hope he didn't lose him?" asked Sir Harry.

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"Oh, no," replied Bob; "he gave a lad a shilling to lead him, and they trudged away very quietly together."

"The old (hiccup)!" exclaimed Sir Harry; "he told me he was a member of the Surrey something."

"The Sorry Union," replied Captain Quod. "He *was* out with them once, and fell off on his head and knocked his hat-crown out."

"Well, but I was telling you about the run," interposed Mr. Sponge, again endeavouring to enlist an audience. "I was telling you about the run," repeated he.

"Don't trouble yourself, my dear sir," interrupted Captain Bouncey; "we know all about it—found—checked—killed, killed—found—checked."

"You *can't* know all about it!" snapped Mr. Sponge; "for there wasn't a soul there but myself, much to my horror, for I had a reg'lar row with old Scamperdale, and never a soul to back me."

"What! you fell in with that mealy-mouthed gentleman, who can't (hiccup) swear because he's a (hiccup) lord, did you?" asked Sir Harry, his attention being now drawn to our friend.

"*I did*," replied Mr. Sponge; "and a pretty passage of politeness we had of it."

"Indeed! (hiccup)," exclaimed Sir Harry. "Tell us (hiccup) all about it."

"Well," said Mr. Sponge, laying the brush lengthways before him on the table, as if he was going to demonstrate upon it. "Well, you see we had a devil of a run—I don't know how many miles, as hard as ever we could lay legs to the ground; one by one the field all dropped astern, except the huntsman and myself. At last he gave in, or rather his horse did, and I was left alone in my glory. Well, we went over the downs at a pace that nothing but blood could live with, and, though my horse has never been beat, and is as thorough-bred as Eclipse—a horse that I have refused three hundred guineas for over and over again, I really did begin to think I might get to the bottom of him, when all of a sudden we came to a dean."

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"Ah! Cockthrottle that would be," observed Sir Harry.

"Daresay," replied Mr. Sponge; "Cock-anything-you-like-to-call-it for me. Well, when we got there, I thought we should have some breathing time, for the fox would be sure to hug it. But no; no sooner had I got there than a countryman hallooed him away on the far side. I got to the halloo as quick as I could, and just as I was blowing the horn," producing Watchorn's from his pocket as he spoke; "for I must tell you," said he, "that when I saw the huntsman's horse was beat, I took this from him—a horn to a foot huntsman being of no more use, you know, than a side-pocket to a cow, or a frilled shirt to a pig. Well, as I was tootling the horn for hard life, who should turn out of the wood but old mealy-mouth himself, as you call him, and a pretty volley of abuse he let drive at me."

"No doubt," hiccuped Sir Harry; "but what was *he* doing there?"

"Oh! I should tell you," replied Mr. Sponge, "his hounds had run a fox into it, and were on him full cry when I got there."

"I'll be bund," cried Sir Harry, "it was all sham—that he just (hiccup) and excuse for getting into that cover. The old (hiccup) beggar is always at some trick, (hiccup)ing my foxes or disturbing my covers or something," Sir Harry being just enough of a master of hounds to be jealous of the neighbouring ones.

"Well, however, there he was," continued Mr. Sponge; "and the first intimation I had of the fact was a great, gruff voice, exclaiming, 'Who the Dickens are you?'"

"'Who the Dickens are you?' replied I."

"Bravo!" shouted Sir Harry.

"Capital!" exclaimed Seedybuck.

"Go it, you cripples! Newgate's on fire!" shouted Captain Quod.

"Well, what said he?" asked Sir Harry.

"'They commonly call me the Earl of Scamperdale,' roared he, 'and those are MY HOUNDS.'"

"'They're *not* your hounds,' replied I."

"'Whose are they, then?' asked he."

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“‘Sir Harry Scattercash’s, a devilish deal better fellow,’ replied I.

“‘Oh, by Jove!’ roared he, ‘there’s an end of everything. Jack,’ shouted he to old Spraggon, ‘this gentleman says these are not my hounds!’

“‘I’ll tell you what it is, my lord,’ said I, gathering my whip and riding close up as if I was goin’ to pitch into him, ‘I’ll tell you what it is; you think, because you’re a lord, you may abuse people as you like, but by Jingo you’ve mistaken your man. I’ll not put up with any of your nonsense. The Sponges are as old a family as the Scamperdales, and I’ll fight you any non-hunting day you like with pistols, broadswords, fists, or blunderbusses.’”

“Well done you! Bravo! that’s your sort!” with loud thumping of tables and clapping of hands, resounded from all parts.

“By Jove, fill him up a stiff ’un! he deserves a good drink after that!” exclaimed Sir Harry, pouring Mr. Sponge out a beaker, equal parts brandy and water.

Mr. Sponge immediately became a hero, and was freely admitted into their circle. He was clearly a choice spirit—a trump of the first water—and they only wanted his name to be uncommonly thick with him. As it was, they plied him with victuals and drink, all seeming anxious to bring him up to the same happy state of inebriety as themselves. They talked and they chattered, and they abused old Scamperdale and Jack Spraggon, and lauded Mr. Sponge up to the skies.

Thus day closed in, with Farmer Peastraw’s bright fire shedding its cheering glow over the now encircling group. One would have thought, that with their hearts mellow, and their bodies comfortable, their minds would have turned to that sport in whose honour they sported the scarlet; but no, hunting was never mentioned. They were quite as genteel as Nimrod’s swell friends at Melton, who cut it altogether. They rambled from subject to subject, chiefly on in-door and London topics; billiards, betting-offices, Coal Holes, Cremorne, Cider Cellars, Judge and Jury Courts, there being an evident



MR. BUGLES PREFERS DANCING TO HUNTING.

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confusion in their minds between the characters of sportsmen and sporting men, or gents as they are called. Mr. Sponge tried hard to get them on the right tack, were it only for the sake of singing the praises of the horse for which he had so often refused three hundred guineas, but he never succeeded in retaining a hearing. Talkers were far more plentiful than listeners.

At last they got to singing, and when men begin to sing, it is a sign that they are either drunk, or have had enough of each other's company. Sir Harry's hiccup, from which he was never wholly free, increased tenfold, and he hiccuped and spluttered at almost every word. His hand, which shook so at starting that it was odds whether he got his glass to his mouth or his ear, was now steadied, but his glazed eye and green haggard countenance showed at what a fearful sacrifice the temporary steadiness had been obtained. At last his jaw dropped on his chest, his left arm hung listlessly over the back of the chair, and he fell asleep. Captain Quod, too, was overcome, and threw himself full-length on the sofa. Captain Seedeybuck began to talk thick.

Just as they were all about brought to a stand-still, the trampling of horses, the rumbling of wheels, and the shrill *twang, twang, twang*, of the now almost forgotten mail horn, roused them from their reveries.

It was Sir Harry's drag scouring the country in search of our party. It had been to all the public-houses and beer-shops within a radius of some miles of Nonsuch House, and was now taking a speculative blow through the centre of the circle.

It was a clear frosty night, and the horses' hoofs rang, and the wheels rolled soundly over the hard road, cracking the thin ice, yet hardly sufficiently frozen to prevent a slight upshot from the wheels.

Twang, twang, twang, went the horn full upon Farmer Pea-straw's house, causing the sleepers to start, and the waking ones to make for the window.

"COACH-A-HOY!" cried Bob Spangles, smashing a pane in a vain attempt to get the window up. The coachman pulled up at the sound.

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“Here we are, Sir Harry!” cried Bob Spangles, into his brother-in-law’s ear, but Sir Harry was too far gone; he could not “come to time.” Presently a footman entered with furred coats, and shawls, and checkered rugs, in which those who were sufficiently sober enveloped themselves, and those who were too far gone were huddled by Peastraw and the man; and amid much hurry and confusion, and jostling for inside seats, the party freighted the coach, and whisked away before Mr. Sponge knew where he was.

When they arrived at Nonsuch House, they found Mr. Bugles exercising the fiddlers by dancing the ladies in turns.

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CHAPTER LIII.

A MOONLIGHT RIDE.



HE position, then, of Mr. Sponge was this. He was left on a frosty, moonlight night at the door of a strange farmhouse, staring after a receding coach, containing all his recent companions.

"You'll not be goin' wi' 'em, then?" observed Mr. Peastraw, who stood beside him, listening to the shrill notes of the horn dying out in the distance.

"No," replied Mr. Sponge.

"Rummy lot," observed Mr. Peastraw, with a shake of the head.

"Are they?" asked Mr. Sponge.

"*Very!*" replied Mr. Peastraw. "Be the death of Sir Harry among 'em."

"Who are they all?" asked Mr. Sponge.

"*Rubbish!*" replied Peastraw, with a sneer, diving his hands into the depths of his pockets. "Well, we'd better go in," added he, pulling his hands out and rubbing them, to betoken that he felt cold.

Mr. Sponge, not being much of a drinker, was more overcome with what he had taken than a seasoned cask would have been; added to which, the keen night air striking upon his heated frame soon sent the liquor into his head. He began to feel queer.

"Well," said he to his host, "I think I'd better be going."

"Where are you bound for?" asked Mr. Peastraw.

"To Puddingpote Bower," replied Mr. Sponge.

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"S-o-o," observed Mr. Peastraw, thoughtfully ; " Mr. Crowdey's—Mr. Jogglebury that was ? "

" Yes," replied Mr. Sponge.

" He is a deuce of a man, that, for breakin' people's hedges," observed Mr. Peastraw ; after a pause, " he can't see a straight stick of no sort, but he's sure to be at it."

" He's a great man for walking-sticks," replied Mr. Sponge, staggering in the direction of the stable in which he put his horse.

The house-clock then struck ten.

" She's fast," observed Mr. Peastraw, fearing his guest might be wanting to stay all night.

" How far will Puddingpote Bower be from here ? " asked Mr. Sponge.

" Oh, no distance, sir, no distance," replied Mr. Peastraw, now leading out the horse. " Can't miss your way, sir—can't miss your way. First turn on the right takes you to Collins' Green : then keep by the side of the church, next the pond ; then go straight forward for about a mile and a half, or two miles, till you come to a small village called Lea Green ; turn short at the finger-post as you enter, and keep right along by the side of the hills till you come to the Winslow Woods ; leave them to the left, and pass by Mr. Roby's farm, at Runton—you'll know Mr. Roby ? "

" Not I," replied Mr. Sponge, hoisting himself into the saddle, and holding out a hand to take leave of his host.

" Good-night, sir ; good-night ! " exclaimed Mr. Peastraw, shaking it ; " and have the goodness to tell Mr. Crowdey from me, that the next time he comes here a bush-rangin', I'll thank him to shut the gates after him. He set all my young stock wrong the last time he was here."

" I will," replied Mr. Sponge, riding off.

Mr. Peastraw's directions were well calculated to confuse a clearer head than Mr. Sponge then carried ; and the reader will not be surprised to learn that, long before he reached the Winslow Woods, he was regularly bewildered. Indeed, there is no surer way of losing oneself than trying to follow a long

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train of directions in a strange country. It is far better to establish one's own landmarks, and make for them as the natural course of the country seems to direct. Our forefathers had a wonderful knack of getting to points with as little circumlocution as possible. Mr. Sponge, however, knew no points, and was quite at sea ; indeed, even if he had, they would have been of little use, for a fitful and frequently obscured moon threw such bewildering lights and shades around, that a native would have had some difficulty in recognising the country. The frost grew more intense, the stars shone clear and bright, and the cold took our friend by the nape of the neck, shooting across his shoulder-blades and right down his back. Mr. Sponge wished and wished he was anywhere but where he was—flattening his nose against the coffee-room window of the “Bantam,” tooling in a Hansom as hard as he could go, squaring along Oxford Street criticising horses—nay, he wouldn't care to be undergoing Gustavus James himself—anything, rather than rambling about a strange country in a cold winter's night, with nothing but the hooting of owls and the occasional bark of shepherds' dogs to enliven his solitude. The houses were few, and far between. The lights in the cottages had long been extinguished, and the occupiers of such of the farmhouses as would come to his knocks were gruff in their answers and short in their directions. At length, after riding, and riding, and riding, more with a view of keeping himself awake than in the expectation of finding his way, just as he was preparing to arouse the inmates of a cottage by the roadside, a sudden gleam of moonlight fell upon the building, revealing the half-Swiss, half-Gothic lodge of Puddingpote Bower.

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CHAPTER LIV.

PUDDINGPOTE BOWER.



WE must now back the train a little, and have a look at Jog and Co.

Mr. and Mrs. Jog had had another squabble after Mr. Sponge's departure in the morning, Mr. Jog reproving Mrs. Jog for the interest she seemed to take in Mr. Sponge, as shown by her going to the door to see him amble away on the piebald hack. Mrs. Jog justified herself on the score of Gustavus James, with whom she was quite sure Mr. Sponge was much struck, and to whom, she made no doubt, he would leave his ample fortune. Jog, on the other hand, wheezed and puffed into his frill, and reasserted that Mr. Sponge was as likely to live as Gustavus James, and to marry, and to have a bushel of children of his own; while Mrs. Jog rejoined that he was "sure to break his neck"—breaking their necks being, as she conceived, the inevitable end of fox-hunters. Jog, who had not prosecuted the sport of hunting long enough to be able to gainsay her assertion, though he took especial care to defer the operation of breaking his own neck as long as he could, fell back upon the expense and inconvenience of keeping Mr. Sponge and his three horses, and his saucy servant, who had taught their domestics to turn up their noses at his diet table; above all, at his stick-jaw and undeniable small-beer. So they went fighting and squabbling on, till at last the scene ended as usual, by Mrs. Jogglebury bursting into tears, and declaring that Jog didn't care a farthing either for her or her children. Jog then bundled off,

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to try and fashion a most incorrigible-looking, knotty black-thorn into a head of Lord Chancellor Lyndhurst. He afterwards took a turn at a hazel that he thought would make a Joe Hume. Having occupied himself with these till the children's dinner-hour, he took a wandering, snatching sort of meal, and then put on his paletot, with a little hatchet in his pocket, and went off in search of the raw material in his own and the neighbouring hedges.

Evening came, and with it came Jog, laden, as usual, with an armful of gibbeys, but the shades of night followed evening ere there was any tidings of the sporting inmates of his house. At length, just as Jog was taking his last stroll prior to going in for good, he espied a pair of vacillating white breeches coming up the avenue with a clearly drunken man inside them. Jog stood straining his eyes watching their movements, wondering whether they would keep the saddle or come off—whenever the breeches seemed irrevocably gone, they invariably recovered themselves with a jerk or a lurch—Jog now saw it was Leather on the piebald, and though he had no fancy for the man, he stood to let him come up, thinking to hear something of Sponge. Leather in due time saw the great looming outline of our friend, and came staring and shaking his head endeavouring to identify it. He thought at first it was the Squire—next he thought it wasn't—then he was sure it wasn't.

“Oh! it's you, old boy, is it?” at last exclaimed he, pulling up beside the large holly against which our friend had placed himself, “It's you, old boy, is it?” repeated he, extending his right hand and nearly over-balancing himself, adding as he recovered his equilibrium, “I thought it was the old woolpack at first,” nodding his head towards the house. “Well,” spluttered he, pulling up, and sitting, as he thought, quite straight in the saddle, “we've had the finest day's sport and the most equitable drink I've enjoyed for many a long day. 'Ord bless us, what a gent that Sir 'Arry is! He's the sort of man that should have money. I'm blowed, if I were queen, but I'd melt all the great blubber-headed fellows like this 'ere Crowdey down, and make one sich man as Sir 'Arry out of the

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'ole on 'em. Beer! they don't know wot beer is there! Nothin' but the werry strongest hale, instead of the puzzon one gets at this awful mean place, that looks like nothin' but the weshin' o' brewers' haprons. O! I 'umbly begs pardon," exclaimed he, dropping from his horse on to his knees on discovering that he was addressing Mr. Crowdey—"I thought it was Robins, the mole-ketcher."

"Thought it was Robins, the mole-catcher," growled Jog; "what have you to do with (puff) Robins, the (wheeze) mole-catcher?"

Jog boiled over with indignation. At first he thought of kicking Leather, a feat that his suppliant position made extremely convenient, if not tempting. Prudence, however, suggested that Leather might have him up for the assault. So he stood puffing and wheezing and eyeing the bleared-eyed, brandy-nosed old drunkard with, as he thought, a withering look of contempt; and then, though the man was drunk, and the night was dark, he waddled off, leaving Mr. Leather on his once white breeches' knees. If Jog had had reasonable time, say an hour or an hour and twenty minutes, to improvise it in, he would have said something uncommonly sharp; as it was he left him with the pertinent inquiry we have recorded—"What have you to do with Robins, the mole-catcher?" We need hardly say that this little incident did not at all ingratiate Mr. Sponge with his host, who re-entered his house in a worse humour than ever. It was insulting a gentleman on his own ter-ri-tory—bearding an Englishman in his own castle. "Not to be borne (puff)," said Jog.

It was now nearly five o'clock, Jog's dinner-hour, and still no Mr. Sponge. Mrs. Jog proposed waiting half an hour, indeed she had told Susan, the cook, to keep the dinner back a little, to give Mr. Sponge a chance, who could not possibly change his tight hunting things for his evening tights in the short space of time that Jog could drop off his loose flowing garments, wash his hands, and run the comb through his lank, candle-like hair.

Five o'clock struck, and Jog was just applying his hand

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to the fat red-and-black worsted bell-pull, when Mrs. Jog announced what she had done.

"Put off the dinner (wheeze), put off the dinner (puff)," repeated he, blowing furiously into his clean shirt-frill, which stuck up under his nose like a hand-saw. "Put off the dinner (wheeze), put off the dinner (puff)—I wish you wouldn't do such (wheeze) things without consulting (gasp) me."

"Well, but, my dear, you couldn't possibly sit down without him," observed Mrs. Jog, mildly.

"Possibly! (puff), possibly! (wheeze)," repeated Jog. "There's no possibly in the matter," retorted he, blowing more furiously into the frill.

Mrs. Jog was silent.

"A man should conform to the (puff) hours of the (wheeze) house," observed Jog, after a pause.

"Well, but, my dear, you know hunters are always allowed a little law," observed Mrs. Jog.

"Law! (puff), law! (wheeze)," retorted Jog. "I never want any law," thinking of *Smiler v. Jogglebury*.

Half-past five o'clock came, and still no Sponge; and Mrs. Jog, thinking it would be better to arrange to have something hot for him when he came, than to do further battle with her husband, gave the bell the double ring indicative of "bring dinner."

"Nay (puff), nay (wheeze); when you have (gasp)ed so long," growled Jog, taking the other tack, "you might as well have (wheez)ed a little longer"—snorting into the frill as he spoke.

Mrs. Jogglebury said nothing, but slipped quietly out, as if after her keys, to tell Susan to keep so-and-so in the meat-screen, and have a few potatoes ready to boil against Mr. Sponge arrived. She then sidled back quietly into the room. Jog and she presently proceeded to that all-important meal, Jog blowing out the company-candles on the side-table as he passed.

Jog munched away with a capital appetite; but Mrs. Jog, who took the bulk of her lading in at the children's dinner, sat trifling with the contents of her plate, listening



GUSTAVUS JAMES IN TROUBLE.

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alternately for the sound of horses' hoofs outside, and for nursery squalls in.

Dinner passed over, and the fruity port and sugary sherry soon usurped the places that stick-jaw pudding and cheese had occupied.

"Mr. (puff) Sponge must be (wheeze), I think," observed Jog, hauling his great silver watch out, like a bucket, from his fob, on seeing that it only wanted ten minutes to seven.

"Oh, Jog!" exclaimed Mrs. Jog, clasping her beautiful hands, and casting her bright beady eyes up to the low ceiling.

"Oh, Jog! What's the matter now? (puff—wheeze—gasp)," exclaimed our friend, reddening up, and fixing his stupid eyes intently on his wife.

"Oh, nothing," replied Mrs. Jog, unclasping her hands, and bringing down her eyes.

"Oh, nothin'!" retorted Jog. "*Nothin'!*" repeated he. "Ladies don't get into such tantrums for nothin'."

"Well, then, Jog, I was thinking if anything should have ha—ha—happened Mr. Sponge, how Gustavus Ja—Ja—James will have lost his chance." And thereupon she dived for her lace-fringed pocket-handkerchief, and hurried out of the room.

But Mrs. Jog had said quite enough to make the caldron of Jog's jealousy boil over, and he sat staring into the fire, imagining all sorts of horrible devices in the coals and cinders, and conjuring up all sorts of evils, until he felt himself possessed of a hundred and twenty thousand devils.

"I'll get shot of this chap at last," said he, with a knowing jerk of his head and a puff into his frill, as he drew his thick legs under his chair, and made a semicircle to get at the bottle. "I'll get shot of this chap," repeated he, pouring himself out a bumper of the syrupy port, and eyeing it at the composite candle. He drained off the glass, and immediately filled another. That, too went down; then he took another, and another, and another; and seeing the bottle get low, he thought he might as well finish it. He felt better after it. Not that he was a bit more reconciled to our friend Mr. Sponge, but he felt more equal to cope with him—he even felt as if he could

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fight him. There did not, however, seem to be much likelihood of his having to perform that ceremony, for nine o'clock struck and no Mr. Sponge, and at half-past Mr. Crowdey stumped off to bed.

Mrs. Crowdey, having given Bartholomew and Susan a dirty pack of cards to play with to keep them awake till Mr. Sponge arrived, went to bed, too, and the house was presently tranquil.

It, however happened, that that amazing prodigy, Gustavus James, having been out on a sort of eleemosynary excursion among the neighbouring farmers and people, exhibiting as well his fine blue-feathered hat, as his astonishing proficiency in "Bah! bah! black sheep," and "Obin and Ichard," getting seed-cake from one, sponge-cake from another, and toffy from a third, was troubled with a very bad stomach-ache during the night, of which he soon made the house sensible by his screams and his cries. Jog and his wife were presently at him; and, as Jog sat in his white cotton nightcap and flowing flannel dressing-gown in an easy chair in the nursery, he heard the crack of the whip, and the prolonged *yeea-yu-u-p* of Mr. Sponge's arrival. Presently the trampling of a horse was heard passing round to the stable. The clock then struck one.

"Pretty hour for a man to come home to a strange house!" observed Mr. Jog, for the nurse, or Murry Ann, or Mrs. Jog, or any one that liked, to take up.

Mrs. Jog was busy with the rhubarb and magnesia, and the others said nothing. After the lapse of a few minutes, the clank, clank, clank of Mr. Sponge's spurs was heard as he passed round to the front, and Mr. Jog stole out on to the landing to hear how he would get in.

Thump! thump! thump! went Mr. Sponge at the door; *rap—tap—tap*, he went at it with his whip.

"Comin', sir! comin'!" exclaimed Bartholomew from the inside.

Presently the shooting of bolts, the withdrawal of bands, and the opening of doors, were heard.

"Not gone to bed yet, old boy?" said Mr. Sponge, as he entered.

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"No, thir!" snuffled the boy, who had a bad cold; "been thitten up for you."

"Old Puff-and-blow gone?" asked Mr. Sponge, depositing his hat and whip on a chair.

The boy gave no answer.

"Is old *Bellows-to-mend gone to bed?*" asked Mr. Sponge in a louder voice.

"The charman's gone," replied the boy, who looked upon his master—the chairman of the Stir-it-stiff Union—as the impersonification of all earthly greatness.

"Dash your impittance," growled Jog, slinking back into the nursery—"I'll pay you off! (puff)," added he, with a jerk of his white night-capped head, "*I'll Bellows-to-mend you!* (wheeze)."

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CHAPTER LV.

FAMILY JARS.



USTAVUS JAMES'S internal qualms being at length appeased, Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey returned to bed, but not to sleep—sleep there was none for him. He was full of indignation and jealousy, and felt suspicious of the very bolster itself. He had been insulted—grossly insulted. Three such names—the “Woolpack,” “Old Puff-and-blow,” and “Bellows-to-mend”—no gentleman, surely, ever was called before by a guest, in his own house. Called, too, before his own servant. What veneration, what respect, could a servant feel for a master whom he heard called “Old Bellows-to-mend”? It damaged the respect inspired by the chairmanship of the Stir-it-stiff Union, to say nothing of the trusteeship of the Sloppyhocks, Tolpuddle, and other turnpike-roads. It annihilated everything. So he fumed, and fretted, and snorted, and snored. Worst of all, he had no one to whom he could unburden his grievance. He could not make the partner of his bosom a partner in his woes, because—and he bounced about so that he almost shot the clothes off the bed, at the thoughts of the “why.”

Thus he lay, tumbling and tossing, and fuming and wheezing and puffing, now vowing vengeance against Leather, who he recollected had called him the “Woolpack,” and determining to have him turned off in the morning for his impudence—now devising schemes for getting rid of Mr. Sponge and him together. Oh, could he but see them off! could he but see the portmanteau and carpet-bag again standing in the passage, he

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would gladly lend his phaeton to carry them anywhere. He would drive it himself for the pleasure of knowing and feeling he was clear of them. He wouldn't haggle about the pikes; nay, he would even give Sponge a gibbey, any he liked—the pick of the whole—Wellington, Napoleon Bonaparte, a crowned head even, though it would damage the set. So he lay, rolling and restless, hearing every clock strike; now trying to divert his thoughts, by making a rough calculation what all his gibbeys put together were worth; now considering whether he had forgotten to go for any he had marked in the course of his peregrinations; now wishing he had laid one about old Leather, when he fell on his knees after calling him the “Woolpack;” then wondering whether Leather would have had him before the County Court for damages, or taken him before Justice Slowcoach for the assault. As morning advanced, his thoughts again turned upon the best mode of getting rid of his most unwelcome guests, and he arose and dressed with the full determination of trying what he could do.

Having tried the effects of an upstairs shout the morning before, he decided to see what a down one would do; accordingly, he mounted the stairs and climbed the sort of companion-ladder that led to the servants' attics, where he kept a stock of gibbeys in the rafters. Having reached this, he cleared his throat, laid his head over the banisters, and putting an open hand on each side of his mouth to direct the sound, exclaimed with a loud and audible voice—

“BARTHOLO—*m—e—w* !”

“BAR—THO—LO—*m—e—e—w* !” repeated he, after a pause, with a full separation of the syllables and a prolonged intonation of the *m—e—w*.

No Bartholomew answered.

“MURRY ANN!” then hallooed Jog, in a sharper, quicker key. “MURRY ANN!” repeated he, still louder, after a pause.

“Yes, sir, here, sir!” exclaimed that invaluable servant, tidying her pink-ribboned cap as she hurried into the passage below. Looking up, she caught sight of her master's great fallow chaps hanging like a flitch of bacon over the garret banister.

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"Oh, Murry Ann," bellowed Mr. Jog, at the top of his voice, still holding his hands to his mouth, as soon as he saw her, "Oh, Murry Ann, you'd better get the (puff) breakfast ready; I think the (gasp) Mr. Sponge will be (wheezing) away to-day."

"Yes, sir," replied Mary Ann.

"And tell Bartholomew to get his washin' bills in."

"He harn't had no washin' done," replied Mary Ann, raising her voice to correspond with that of her master.

"Then his bill for postage," replied Mr. Jog, in the same tone.

"He harn't had no letters neither," replied Mary Ann.

"Oh, then, just get the breakfast ready," rejoined Jog; adding, "he'll be (wheezing) away as soon as he gets it, I (puff) expect."

"*Will he,*" said Mr. Sponge to himself, as, with throbbing head, he lay tumbling about in bed, alleviating the recollections of the previous day's debauch with an occasional dive into his old friend "Mogg." Corporeally, he was in bed at Puddingpote Bower, but, mentally, he was at the door of the "Goose and Gridiron," in St. Paul's Churchyard, waiting for the three o'clock 'bus, coming from the Bank to take him to Isleworth Gate.

Jog's bellow to "Bartholo—*m—e—w*" interrupted the journey, just as in imagination Mr. Sponge was putting his foot on the wheel and hallooing to the driver to hand him the strap to help him on to the box.

"*Will he,*" said Mr. Sponge to himself, as he heard Jog's reiterated assertion that he would be wheezing away that day. "Wish you may get it, old boy," added he, tucking the now backless "Mogg" under his pillow, and turning over for a snooze.

When he got down, he found the party ranged at breakfast, minus the interesting prodigy, Gustavus James, whom Sponge proceeded to inquire after as soon as he had made his obeisance to his host and hostess, and distributed a round of daubed comfits to the rest of the juvenile party.

"But where's my little friend, Augustus James?" asked he,

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on arriving at the wonder's high chair by the side of mamma. "Where's my little friend, Augustus James?" asked he, with an air of concern.

"Oh, *Gustavus* James," replied Mrs. Jog, with an emphasis on *Gustavus*; "*Gustavus* James is not very well this morning; had a little indigestion during the night."

"Poor little hound," observed Mr. Sponge, filling his mouth with hot kidney, glad to be rid for a time of the prodigy. "I thought I heard a row when I came home, which was rather late for an early man like me; but the fact was, nothing would serve Sir Harry but I should go with him to get some refreshment at a tenant's of his; and we got on, talking first about one thing and then about another, and the time slipped away so quickly, that day was gone before I knew where I was; and though Sir Harry was most anxious—indeed, would hardly take a refusal—for me to go home with him, I felt that, being a guest here, I couldn't do it,—at least, not then; so I got my horse, and tried to find my way with such directions as the farmer gave me, and soon lost my way, for the moon was uncertain, and the country all strange both to me and my horse."

"What farmer was it?" asked Jog, with the butter streaming down the gutters of his chin from a mouthful of thick toast.

"Farmer—farmer—farmer,—let me see, what farmer it was," replied Mr. Sponge, thoughtfully, again attacking the kidneys. "Oh, Farmer Beanstraw, I should say."

"*Peastraw*, p'raps?" suggested Jog, colouring up, and staring intently at Mr. Sponge.

"Pea—*Peastraw* was the name," replied Mr. Sponge.

"I know him," said Jog; "*Peastraw*, of Stoke."

"Ah, he said he knew you," replied Mr. Sponge.

"Did he?" asked Jog, eagerly. "What did he say?"

"Say—let me see what he said," replied he, pretending to recollect. "He said 'you are a deuced good feller,' and I'd to make his compliments to you, and to say that there were some nice young ash saplings on his farm that you were welcome to cut."

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"Did he?" exclaimed Jog; "I'm sure that's very (puff) polite of him. I'll (wheeze) over there the first opportunity."

"And what did you make of Sir Harry?" asked Mrs. Jog.

"Did you (puff) say you were going to (wheeze) over to him?" asked Jog, eagerly.

"I told him I'd go to him before I left the country," replied Mr. Sponge, carelessly; adding, "Sir Harry is rather too fast a man for me."

"Too fast for himself, I should think," observed Mrs. Jog.

"Fine (puff—wheeze) young man," growled Jog into the bottom of his cup.

"Have you known him long?" asked Mrs. Jogglebury.

"Oh, we fox-hunters all know each other," replied Mr. Sponge, evasively.

"Well, now that's what I tell Mr. Jogglebury," exclaimed she. "Mr. Jog's so shy, that there's no getting him to do what he ought," added the lady. "No one, to hear him, would think he's the great man he is."

"Ought (puff)—ought (wheeze)," retorted Jog, puffing furiously into his capacious shirt-frill. "It's one (puff) thing to know (puff) people out with the (wheeze) hounds, and another to go calling upon them at their (gasp) houses."

"Well, but, my dear, that's the way people make acquaintance," replied his wife. "Isn't it, Mr. Sponge?" continued she, appealing to our friend.

"Oh, certainly," replied Mr. Sponge, "certainly; all men are equal out hunting."

"So I say," exclaimed Mrs. Jogglebury; "and yet I can't get Jog to call on Sir George Stiff, though he meets him frequently out hunting."

"Well, but then I can't (puff) upon him out hunting (wheeze), and then we're not all equal (gasp) when we go home."

So saying, our friend rose from his chair, and after giving each leg its usual shake, and banging his pockets behind to feel that he had his keys safe, he strutted consequentially up to the window to see how the day looked.

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Mr. Sponge, not being desirous of continuing the "calling" controversy, especially as it might lead to inquiries relative to his acquaintance with Sir Harry, finished the contents of his plate quickly, drank up his tea, and was presently alongside of his host, asking him whether he "was good for a ride, a walk, or what?"

"A (puff) ride, a (wheeze) walk, or a (gasp) what?" repeated Jog, thoughtfully. "No, I (puff) think I'll stay at (puff) home," thinking that would be the safest plan.

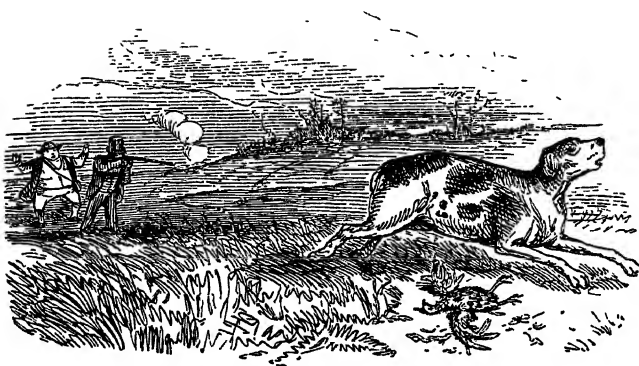
"Ord hang it, you'll never lie at earth such a day as this!" exclaimed Sponge, looking out on the bright, sunny landscape.

"Got a great deal to do," retorted Jog, who, like all thoroughly idle men, was always dreadfully busy. He then dived into a bundle of rough sticks, and proceeded to select one to fashion into the head of Mr. Hume. Sponge, being unable to make anything of him, was obliged to exhaust the day in the stable, and in sauntering about the country. It was clear Jog was determined to be rid of him, and he was sadly puzzled what to do. Dinner found his host in no better humour, and after a sort of Quakers' meeting of an evening, they parted heartily sick of each other.

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CHAPTER LVI.

THE TRIGGER.



Mr. Sponge gives Ponto a Lesson.

JOG slept badly again, and arose next morning full of projects for getting rid of his impudent, uncere-
monious, free-and-easy guest.

Having tried both an up and a down-stairs shout, he now went out and planted himself immediately under Mr. Sponge's bedroom window, and, clearing his voice, commenced his usual vociferations.

"Bartholo—*m—e—w*!" whined he. "*Bartholo—m—e—w*!" repeated he, somewhat louder. "*BAR—THOLO—m—e—w*!" roared he, in a voice of thunder.

Bartholomew did not answer.

"Murry Ann!" exclaimed Jog, after a pause. "*Murry Ann*!" repeated he, still louder. "*MURRY ANN*!" roared he, at the top of his voice.

"Comin', sir! comin'!" exclaimed Mary Ann, peeping down upon him from the garret-window.

"Oh, Murry Ann," cried Mr. Jog, looking up, and catching the ends of her blue ribbons streaming past the window-frame,

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as she changed her nightcap for a day one,—“ Oh, Murry Ann, you'd better be (puff)in' forrard with the (gasp) breakfast ; Mr. Sponge 'll most likely be (wheez)in' away to-day.”

“ Yes, sir,” replied Mary Ann, adjusting the cap becomingly.

“ Confounded, puffing, wheezing, gasping, broken-winded old blockhead it is !” growled Mr. Sponge, wishing he could get to his former earth at Puffington's, or anywhere else. When he got down he found Jog in a very roomy, bright, green-plush shooting-jacket, with pockets innumerable, and a whistle suspended to a button-hole. His nether man was encased in a pair of most dilapidated white moleskins, that had been degraded from hunting into shooting ones, and whose cracks and darns showed the perils to which their wearer had been exposed. Below these were drab, horn-buttoned gaiters, and hobnailed shoes.

“ Going a-gunning, are you ? ” asked Mr. Sponge, after the morning salutation, which Jog returned most gruffly.

“ I'll go with you,” said Mr. Sponge, at once dispelling the delusion of his wheezing away.

“ Only going to frighten the (puff) rooks off the (gasp) wheat,” replied Jog, carelessly, not wishing to let Sponge see what a numb hand he was with a gun.

“ I thought you told me you were going to get me a hare,” observed Mrs. Jog ; adding, “ I'm sure shooting is a much more rational amusement than tearing your clothes going after the hounds,” eyeing the much-dilapidated moleskins as she spoke.

Mrs. Jog found shooting more useful than hunting.

“ Oh, if a (puff) hare comes in my (gasp) way, I'll turn her over,” replied Jog, carelessly, as if turning them over was quite a matter of course with him ; adding, “ but I'm not (wheezing) out for the express purpose of shooting one.”

“ Ah, well,” observed Sponge, “ I'll go with you, all the same.”

“ But I've only got one gun,” gasped Jog, thinking it would be worse to have Sponge laughing at his shooting than even leaving him at home.



FRANTIC DELIGHT OF PONTO.

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.

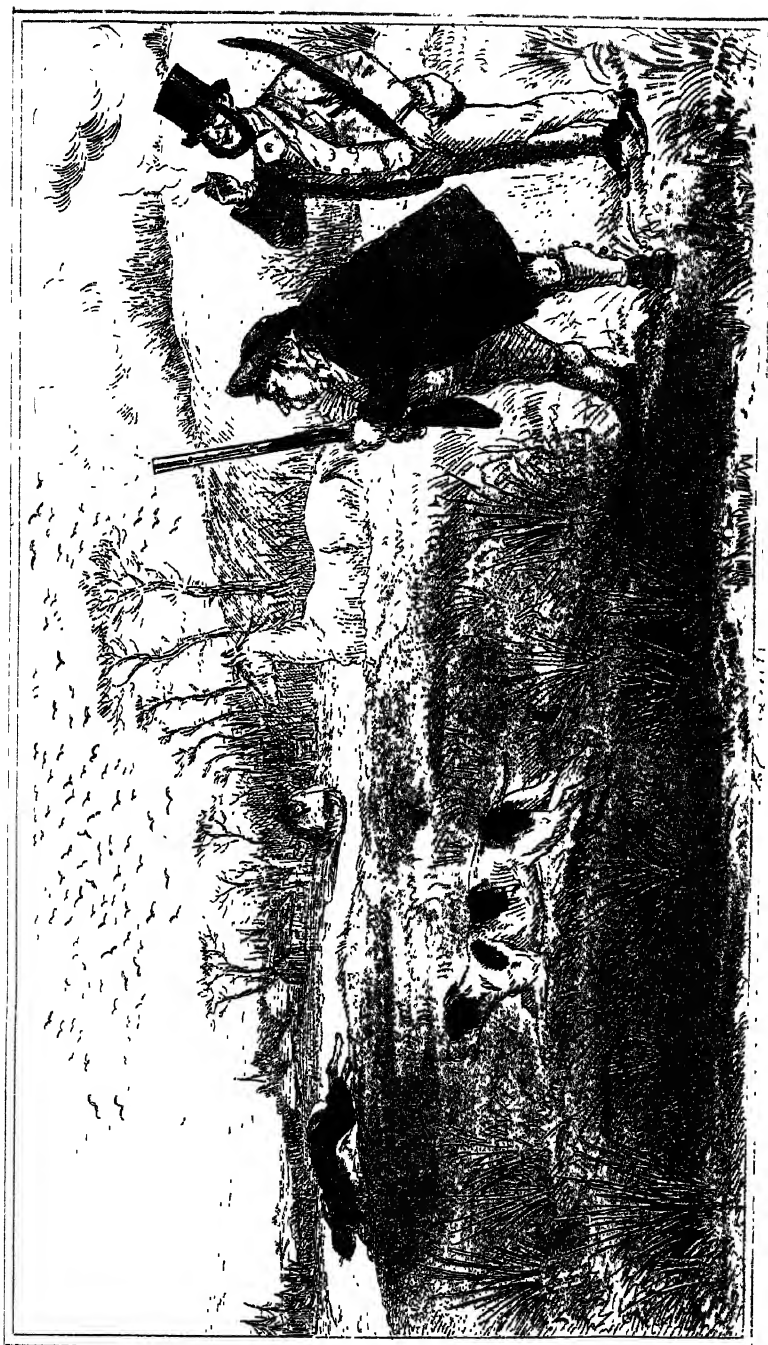
"Then, we'll shoot turn and turn about," replied the pertinacious guest.

Jog did his best to dissuade him, observing that the birds were (puff) scarce and (wheeze) wild, and the (gasp) hares much troubled with poachers; but Mr. Sponge wanted a walk, and moreover had a fancy for seeing Jog handle his gun.

Having cut himself some extremely substantial sandwiches, and filled his "monkey" full of sherry, our friend Jog slipped out the back way to loosen old Ponto, who acted the triple part of pointer, house-dog, and horse to Gustavus James. He was a great fat, black-and-white brute, with a head like a hat-box, a tail like a clothes-peg, and a back as broad as a well-fed sheep's. The old brute was so frantic at the sight of his master in his green coat, and wide-awake to match, that he jumped and bounced, and barked, and rattled his chain, and set up such yells, that his noise sounded all over the house, and soon brought Mr. Sponge to the scene of action, where stood our friend, loading his gun and looking as consequential as possible.

"I shall only just take a (puff) stroll over moy (wheeze) ter-ri-to-ry," observed Jog, as Mr. Sponge emerged at the back door.

Jog's pace was about two miles and a half an hour, stoppages included, and he thought it advisable to prepare Mr. Sponge for the trial. He then shouldered his gun and waddled away, first over the stile into Farmer Stiffland's stubble, round which Ponto ranged in the most riotous, independent way, regardless of Jog's whistles and rates, and the crack of his little knotty whip. Jog then crossed the old pasture into Mr. Lowland's turnips, into which Ponto dashed in the same energetic way, but these impediments to travelling soon told on his great buttermilk carcass, and brought him to a more subdued pace; still, the dog had a good deal more energy than his master. Round he went, sniffing and hunting, then dashing right through the middle of the field, as if he was out on his own account alone, and had nothing whatever to do with a master.



with the dog and the

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"Why, your dog'll spring all the birds out of shot," observed Mr. Sponge; and, just as he spoke, *whirr!* rose a covey of partridges, eleven in number, quite at an impossible distance, but Jog blazed away all the same.

"Ord rot it, man! if you'd only held your (something) tongue," growled Jog, as he shaded the sun from his eyes to mark them down, "I'd have (wheezed) half of them over."

"Nonsense, man!" replied Mr. Sponge. "They were a mile out of shot."

"I think I should know my (puff) gun better than (wheeze) you," replied Jog, bringing it down to load.

"They're down!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, who, having watched them till they began to skim in their flight, saw them stop, flap their wings, and drop among some straggling gorse on the hill before them. "Let's break the covey; we shall bag them better singly."

"Take time (puff)," replied Jog, snorting into his frill, and measuring out his powder most leisurely. "Take time (wheeze)," repeated he; "they're just on the bounds of moy ter-ri-to-ry."

Jog had had many a game at romps with these birds, and knew their haunts and habits to a nicety. The covey consisted of thirteen at first, but by repeated blazings into the "brown of 'em," he had succeeded in knocking down two. Jog was not one of your conceited shots, who never fired but when he was sure of killing; on the contrary, he always let drive far or near; and even if he shot a hare, which he sometimes did, with the first barrel, he always popped the second into her, to make sure. The chairman's shooting afforded amusement to the neighbourhood. On one occasion a party of reapers, having watched him miss twelve shots in succession, gave him three cheers on coming to the thirteenth.—But to our day. Jog had now got his gun reloaded with mischief, the cap put on, and all ready for a fresh start. Ponto, meanwhile, had been ranging, Jog thinking it better to let him take the edge off his ardour than conform to the strict rules of lying down or coming to heel.

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"Now, let's on," cried Mr. Sponge, stepping out quickly.

"Take time (puff), take time (wheeze)," gasped Jog, waddling along, "better let 'em settle a little (puff). Better let 'em settle a little (gasp)," added he, labouring on.

"Oh no, keep them moving," replied Mr. Sponge,—“keep them moving. Only get at 'em on the hill, and drive 'em into the fields below, and we shall have rare fun.”

"But the (puff) fields below are not mine," gasped Jog.

"Whose are they?" asked Mr. Sponge.

"Oh (puff), Mrs. Moses's," gasped Jog. "My stoopid old uncle," continued he, stopping, and laying hold of Mr. Sponge's arm, as if to illustrate his position, but in reality to get breath,—“my stoopid old uncle (puff) missed buying that (wheeze) land when old Harry Griperton died. I only wanted that to make moy (wheeze) ter-ri-to-ry extend all the (gasp) way up to Cockwhistle Park there,” continued he, climbing on to a stile they now approached, and setting aside the top stone. "That's Cockwhistle Park, up there—just where you see the (puff) wind-mill—then (puff) moy (wheeze) ter-ri-to-ry comes up to the (wheeze) fallow you see all yellow with runch; and if my old (puff) uncle (wheeze) Crowdey had had the sense of a (gasp) goose, he'd have (wheezed) that when it was sold. Moy (puff) name was (wheeze) Jogglebury," added he, "before my (gasp) uncle died."

"Well, never mind about that," replied Mr. Sponge; "let us go on after these birds."

"Oh, we'll (puff) up to them presently," observed Jog, labouring away, with half a ton of clay at each foot, the sun having dispelled the frost where it struck, and made the land carry.

"*Presently!*" retorted Mr. Sponge. "But you should make haste, man."

"Well, but let me go my own (puff) pace," snapped Jog, labouring away.

"Pace!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, "your own crawl, you should say."

"Indeed!" growled Jog, with an angry snort.

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They now got through a well-established cattle-gap into a very rushy, squashy, gorse-grown pasture, at the bottom of the rising ground on which Mr. Sponge had marked the birds. Ponto, whose energetic exertions had been gradually relaxing, until he had settled down to a leisurely hunting-dog, suddenly stood transfixed, with the right foot up, and his gaze settled on a rushy tuft.

"*P-o-o-n-to!*" ejaculated Jog, expecting every minute to see him dash at it. "*P-o-o-n-to!*" repeated he, raising his hand.

Mr. Sponge stood on the tip-toe of expectation; Jog raised his wide-awake hat from his eyes, and advanced cautiously with the engine of destruction cocked. Up started a great hare; *bang!* went the gun with the hare none the worse. *Bang!* went the other barrel, which the hare acknowledged by two or three stotting bounds and an increase of pace.

"*Well missed!*" exclaimed Mr. Sponge.

Away went Ponto in pursuit.

"*P-o-o-n-to!*" shrieked Jog, stamping with rage.

"I could have wiped your nose," exclaimed Mr. Sponge, covering the hare with a hedge-stake placed to his shoulder like a gun.

"Could you?" growled Jog; "s'pose you wipe your own," added he, not understanding the meaning of the term.

Meanwhile, old Ponto went rolling away most energetically, the farther he went the farther he was left behind, till the hare having scuttled out of sight, he wheeled about and came leisurely back, as if he was doing all right.

Jog was very wroth, and vented his anger on the dog, which, he declared, had caused him to miss, vowing, as he rammed away at the charge, that he never missed such a shot before. Mr. Sponge stood eyeing him with a look of incredulity, thinking that a man who could miss such a shot could miss anything. They were now all ready for a fresh start, and Ponto, having pocketed his objurgation, dashed forward again up the rising ground over which the covey had dropped.

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Jog's thick wind was a serious impediment to the expeditious mounting of the hill, and the dog seemed aware of his infirmity, and to take pleasure in aggravating him.

"*P-o-o-n-to!*" gasped Jog, as he slipped, and scrambled, and toiled, sorely impeded by the incumbrance of his gun.

But P-o-o-n-to heeded him not. He knew his master couldn't catch him, and if he did, that he durstn't flog him.

"*P-o-o-n-to!*" gasped Jog again, still louder, catching at a bush to prevent his slipping back. "*T-o-o-h-o-o! P-o-o-n-to!*" wheezed he; but the dog just rolled his great stern, and bustled about more actively than ever.

"Hang ye! but I'd cut you in two if I had you!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, eyeing his independent proceedings.

"He's not a bad (puff) dog," observed Jog, mopping the perspiration from his brow.

"He's not a good 'un," retorted Mr. Sponge.

"D'ye think not (wheeze)?" asked Jog.

"Sure of it," replied Sponge.

"Serves me," growled Jog, labouring up the hill.

"Easy served," replied Mr. Sponge, whistling, and eyeing the independent animal.

"*T-o-o-h-o-o! P-o-o-n-to!*" gasped Jog, as he dashed forward on reaching level ground more eagerly than ever.

"*P-o-o-n-to! T-o-o-h-o-o!*" repeated he, in a still louder tone, with the same success.

"You'd better get up to him," observed Mr. Sponge, "or he'll spring all the birds."

Jog, however, blundered on at his own pace, growling—

"Most (puff) haste, least (wheeze) speed."

The dog was now fast drawing upon where the birds lit; and Mr. Sponge and Jog having reached the top of the hill, Mr. Sponge stood still to watch the result.

Up whirled four birds out of a patch of gorse behind the dog, all presenting most beautiful shots. Jog blazed a barrel at them without touching a feather, and the report of the gun immediately raised three brace more, into the thick of which he fired with similar success. They all skimmed away unhurt.

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"Well missed!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge again. "You're what they call a good shooter but a bad hitter."

"You're what they call a (wheeze) fellow," growled Jog.

He meant to say "saucy," but the word wouldn't rise. He then commenced re-loading his gun, and lecturing P-o-o-n-to, who still continued his exertions, and inwardly anathematising Mr. Sponge. He wished he had left him at home. Then recollecting Mrs. Jog he thought perhaps he was as well where he was. Still his presence made him shoot worse than usual, and there was no occasion for that.

"Let *me* have a shot now," said Mr. Sponge.

"Shot (puff)—shot (wheeze); well, take a shot if you choose," replied he.

Just as Mr. Sponge got the gun, up rose the eleventh bird, and he knocked it over.

"*That's* the way to do it!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, as the bird fell dead before Ponto.

The excited dog, unused to such descents, snatched it up and ran off. Just as he was getting out of shot, Mr. Sponge fired the other barrel at him, causing him to drop the bird and run yelping and howling away. Jog was furious. He stamped, and gasped, and fumed, and wheezed, and seemed like to burst with anger and indignation. Though the dog ran away as hard as he could lick, Jog insisted that he was mortally wounded, and would die. "He never saw so (wheeze) a thing done. He wouldn't have taken twenty pounds for the dog. No, he wouldn't have taken thirty. Forty wouldn't have bought him. He was worth fifty of anybody's money," and so he went on, fuming and advancing his value as he spoke.

Mr. Sponge stole away to where the dog had dropped the bird; and Mr. Jog, availing himself of his absence, retraced his steps down the hill, and struck off home at a much faster pace than he came. Arrived there, he found the dog in the kitchen, somewhat sore from the visitation of the shot, but not sufficiently injured to prevent his enjoying a most liberal plate of stick-jaw pudding, supplied by a general contribution of the servants. Jog's wrath was then turned in another direction, and he blew

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up for the waste and extravagance of the act, hinting pretty freely that he knew who it was that had set them against it. Altogether he was full of troubles, vexations, and annoyances; and after spending another most disagreeable evening with our friend Sponge, went to bed more determined than ever to get rid of him.

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CHAPTER LVII.

NONSUCH HOUSE AGAIN.



DOOR Jog again varied his hints the next morning. After sundry prefatory "Murry Anns!" and "Bar-tho-lo-mews!" he at length got the latter to answer, when, raising his voice so as to fill the whole house, he desired him to go to the stable, and let Mr. Sponge's man know his master would be (wheezing) away.

"You're wrong there, old buck," growled Leather, as he heard the foregoing; "he's halfway to Sir 'Arry's by this time."

And, sure enough, Mr. Sponge was, as none knew better than Leather, who had got him his horse, the hack being indisposed,—that is to say, having been out all night with Mr. Leather on a drinking excursion, Leather having just got home in time to receive the purple-coated, bare-footed runner of Nonsuch House, who dropped in, *en passant*, to see if there was anything to stow away in his roomy trouser-pockets, and leave word that Sir Harry was going to hunt, and would meet before the house.

Leather, though somewhat muzzy, was sufficiently sober to be able to deliver this message, and acquaint Mr. Sponge with the impossibility of his "ridin' the hack." Indeed, he truly said, that he had "been hup with him all night, and at one time thought it was all hover with him," the all-overishness consisting of Mr. Leather being nearly all over the hack's head, in consequence of the animal shying at another drunken man lying across the road.

Mr. Sponge listened to the recital with the indifference

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of a man who rides hack-horses, and coolly observed that Leather must take on the chestnut, and he would ride the brown to cover.

"Couldn't, sir, *couldn't*," replied Leather, with a shake of the head and a twinkle of his roguish, watery grey eyes.

"Why not?" asked Mr. Sponge, who never saw any difficulty.

"Oh, sur," replied Leather, in a tone of despondency, "it would be quite impossible. Consider wot a day the last one was; why, he didn't get to rest till three the next mornin'."

"It'll only be walking exercise," observed Mr. Sponge; "do him good."

"Better valk the chestnut," replied Mr. Leather; "Multum-in-Parvo hasn't 'ad a good day this I don't know wen, and will be all the better of a bucketin'."

"But I hate crawling to cover on my horse," replied Mr. Sponge, who liked cantering along with a flourish.

"You'll 'ave to crawl if you ride 'Ercles," observed Leather, "if not walk. Bless you! I've been a nussin' of him and the 'ack most the 'ole night."

"Indeed!" replied Mr. Sponge, who began to be alarmed lest his hunting might be brought to an abrupt termination.

"True as I'm 'ere," rejoined Leather. "He's just as much off his grub as he vos when he come'd in; never see'd an 'oss more reg'larly dished—more——"

"Well, well," said Mr. Sponge, interrupting the catalogue of grievances; "I s'pose I must do as you say—I s'pose I must do as you say: what sort of a day is it?"

"Vy, the day's not a bad day; at least, that's to say, it's not a wery haggrivatin' day. I've seen a betterer day, in course; but I've also seen many a much worser day, and days at this time of the year, you know, are apt to change, —sometimes, in course, for the betterer — sometimes, in course, for the worser."

"*Is it a frost?*" snapped Mr. Sponge, tired of his loquacity.

"Is it a frost?" repeated Mr. Leather, thoughtfully; "is it a frost? Vy, no; I should say it *isn't* a frost,—at least, not

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a frost to 'urt; there may be a little rind on the ground and a little rawness in the hair, but the general concatenation——”

“*Hout, tout!*” exclaimed Mr. Sponge, “let’s have none of your dictionary words.”

Mr. Leather stood silent, twisting his hat about.

The consequence of all this was, that Mr. Sponge determined to ride over to Nonsuch House to breakfast, which would give his horse half an hour in the stable to eat a feed of corn. Accordingly, he desired Leather to bring him his shaving-water, and have the horse ready in the stable in half an hour, whither, in due time, Mr. Sponge emerged by the back door, without encountering any of the family. The ambling piebald looked so crestfallen and woe-begone in all the swaddling-clothes in which Leather had got him enveloped, that Mr. Sponge did not care to look at the gallant Hercules, who occupied a temporary loose box at the far end of the dark stable, lest he might look worse. He, therefore, just mounted Multum-in-Parvo as Leather led him out at the door, and set off without a word.

“Well, hang me but you are a good judge of weather,” exclaimed Sponge to himself, as he got into the field at the back of the house, and found the horse made little impression on the grass. “*No frost!*” repeated he, breathing into the air; “why, it’s freezing now, out of the sun.”

On getting into Marygold Lane, our friend drew rein, and was for turning back, but the resolute chestnut took the bit between his teeth and shook his head, as if determined to go on.

“Oh, you *brute!*” growled Mr. Sponge, letting the spurs into his sides with a hearty good-will, which caused the animal to kick, as if he meant to stand on his head. “Ah, you *will*, will ye?” exclaimed Mr. Sponge, letting the spurs in again as the animal replaced his legs on the ground. Up they went again, if possible higher than before.

The brute was clearly full of mischief, and even if the hounds did not throw off, which there was little prospect of their doing from the appearance of the weather, Mr. Sponge felt that it

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would be well to get some of the nonsense taken out of him; and, moreover, going to Nonsuch House would give him a chance of establishing a billet there—a chance that he had been deprived of by Sir Harry's abrupt departure from Farmer Peastraw's. So saying, our friend gathered his horse together, and settling himself in his saddle, made his sound hoofs ring upon the hard road.

"He *may* hunt," thought Mr. Sponge, as he rattled along; "such a rum beggar as Sir Harry may think it fun to go out in a frost. It's hard, too," said he, as he saw the poor turnip-pullers enveloped in their thick shawls, and watched them thumping their arms against their sides to drive the cold from their finger ends.

Multum-in-Parvo was a good sound-constituted horse, hard and firm as a cricket-ball, a horse that would not turn a hair for a trifle even on a hunting morning, let alone on such a thorough chiller as this one was; and Mr. Sponge, after going along at a good round pace, and getting over the ground much quicker than he did when the road was all new to him and he had to ask his way, at length drew in to see what o'clock it was. It was only half-past nine, and already in the far distance he saw the encircling woods of Nonsuch House.

"Shall be early," said Mr. Sponge, returning his watch to his waistcoat-pocket, and diving into his cutty coat-pocket for the cigar-case. Having struck a light, he now laid the rein on the horse's neck and proceeded leisurely along, the animal stepping gaily and throwing its head about as if he was the quietest, most trustworthy nag in the world. If he got there at half-past ten, Mr. Sponge calculated he would have plenty of time to see after his horse, get his own breakfast, and see how the land lay for a billet.

It would be impossible to hunt before twelve; so he went smoking and sauntering along, now wondering whether he would be able to establish a billet, now thinking how he would like to sell Sir Harry a horse, then considering whether he would be likely to pay for him, and enlivening

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the general reflections by ringing his spurs against his stirrup-irons.

Having passed the lodges at the end of the avenue, he cocked his hat, twiddled his hair, felt his tie, and arranged for a becoming appearance. The sudden turn of the road brought him full upon the house. How changed the scene! Instead of scarlet-coated youths thronging the gravelled ring, flourishing their scented kerchiefs and hunting-whips—instead of buxom Abigails and handsome mistresses hanging out of the windows, flirting and chatting and ogling, the door was shut, the blinds were down, the shutters closed, and the whole house had the appearance of mourning.

Mr. Sponge reined up involuntarily, startled at the change of scene. What could have happened! Could Sir Harry be dead? Could my lady have eloped? “Oh, that horrid Bugles!” thought he; “he looked like a gay deceiver.” And Mr. Sponge felt as if he had sustained a personal injury.

Just as these thoughts were passing in his mind, a drowsy, slatternly charwoman, in an old black straw bonnet and grey bedgown, opened one of the shutters, and throwing up the sash of the window by where Mr. Sponge sat, disclosed the contents of the apartment. The last waxlight was just dying out in the centre of a splendid candelabra on the middle of a table scattered about with claret-jugs, glasses, decanters, pineapple tops, grape-dishes, cakes, anchovy-toast plates, devilled biscuit-racks—all the concomitants of a sumptuous entertainment.

“Sir Harry at home?” asked Mr. Sponge, making the woman sensible of his presence by cracking his whip close to her ear.

“No,” replied the dame, gruffly, commencing an assault upon the nearest chair with a duster.

“Where is he?” asked our friend.

“Bed, to be sure,” replied the woman, in the same tone.

“Bed, to be sure,” repeated Mr. Sponge. “I don’t think there’s any ‘sure’ in the case. Do you know what o’clock it is?” asked he.

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"No," replied the woman, flopping away at another chair, and arranging the crimson velvet curtains on the holders.

Mr. Sponge was rather nonplussed. His red coat did not command the respect that a red coat generally does. The fact was, they had such queer people in red coats at Nonsuch House, that a red coat was rather an object of suspicion than otherwise.

"Well, but my good woman," continued Mr. Sponge, softening his tone, "can you tell me where I shall find anybody who can tell me anything about the hounds?"

"No," growled the woman, still flopping, and whisking, and knocking the furniture about.

"I'll remember you for your trouble," observed Mr. Sponge, diving his right hand into his breeches pocket.

"Mr. Bottleends be gone to bed," observed the woman, now ceasing her evolutions, and parting her grisly, disordered tresses, as she advanced and stood staring, with her arms akimbo, out of the window. She was the under-housemaid's deputy, all the servants at Nonsuch House doing the rough of their work by deputy. Lady Scattercash was a *real* lady, and liked to have the credit of the house maintained, which of course can only be done by letting the upper servants do nothing. "Mr. Bottleends be gone to bed," observed the woman.

"Mr. Bottleends?" repeated Mr. Sponge; "who's he?"

"The butler, to be sure," replied she, astonished that any person should have to ask who such an important personage was.

"Can't you call him?" asked Mr. Sponge, still fumbling in his pocket.

"Couldn't, if it was ever so," replied the dame, smoothing her dirty blue-checked apron with her still dirtier hand.

"Why not?" asked Mr. Sponge.

"*Why not?*" repeated the woman; "why, 'cause Mr. Bottleends won't be disturbed by no one. He said when he went to bed that he hadn't to be called till to-morrow."

"Not called till to-morrow," exclaimed Mr. Sponge; "then is Sir Harry from home?"



MR. SPONGE'S RED COAT COMMANDS NO RESPECT.

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"From home, no; what should put that i' your head?" sneered the woman.

"Why, if the butler's in bed, one may suppose the master's away."

"*Hout!*" snapped the woman; "Sir Harry's i' bed—Captin Seedeeybuck's i' bed—Captin Quod's i' bed—Captin Spangle's i' bed—Captin Bouncey's i' bed—Captin Cutitfat's i' bed—they're all i' bed 'cept me, and I've got the house to clean and right, and high time it was cleaned and righted, for they've not been i' bed these three nights any on 'em." So saying, she flourished her duster as if about to set-to again.

"Well, but tell me," exclaimed Mr. Sponge, "can I see the footman, or the huntsman, or the groom, or a helper, or anybody?"

"Deary knows," replied the woman, thoughtfully, resting her chin on her hand. "I daresay they'll be all i' bed too."

"But they are going to hunt, arn't they?" asked our friend.

"*Hunt!*" exclaimed the woman; "what should put that i' your head?"

"Why, they sent me word they were."

"It'll be i' bed then," observed she, again giving symptoms of a desire to return to her dusting.

Mr. Sponge, who still kept his hand in his pocket, sat on his horse in a state of stupid bewilderment. He had never seen a case of this sort before—a house shut up, and a master of hounds in bed when the hounds were to meet before the door. It couldn't be the case: the woman must be dreaming, or drunk, or both.

"Well, but my good woman," exclaimed he, as she gave a punishing cut at the chair, as if to make up for lost time; "well, but my good woman, I wish you would try and find somebody who can tell me something about the hounds. I'm sure they must be going to hunt. I'll remember you for your trouble, if you will," added he, again diving his hand up to the wrist in his pocket.

"I tell you," replied the woman slowly and deliberately, "there'll be no huntin' to-day. Huntin'!" exclaimed she;

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"how can they hunt when they've all had to be carried to bed?"

"Carried to bed! had they?" exclaimed Mr. Sponge; "what, were they drunk?"

"Drunk! ay, to be sure. What would you have them be?" replied the crone, who seemed to think that drinking was a necessary concomitant of hunting.

"Well, but I can see the footman or somebody, surely," observed Mr. Sponge, fearing that his chance was out for a billet, and recollecting all Jog's "*Bartholo-m-e-ws!*" and "*Murry Anns!*" and intimations for him to start.

"'Deed you can't," replied the dame—"ye can see neboddy but me," added she, fixing her twinkling eyes intently upon him as she spoke.

"Well, that's a pretty go," observed Mr. Sponge aloud to himself, ringing his spurs against his stirrup-irons.

"Pretty go or ugly go," snapped the woman, thinking it was a reflection on herself, "it's all you'll get;" and thereupon she gave the back of the chair a hearty bastinadoing as if in exemplification of the way she would like to serve Mr. Sponge out for the observation.

"I came here thinking to get some breakfast," observed Mr. Sponge, casting an eye upon the disordered table, and reconnoitring the bottles and the remains of the dessert.

"Did you?" said the woman; "I wish you may get it."

"I wish I may," replied he. "If you would manage that for me, just some coffee and a mutton chop or two, I'd remember you," said he, still tantalising her with the sound of the silver in his pocket.

"Me manish it!" exclaimed the woman, her hopes again rising at the sound; "me manish it! how d'ye think I'm to manish sich things?" asked she.

"Why, get at the cook, or the housekeeper, or somebody," replied Mr. Sponge.

"Cook or housekeeper!" exclaimed she. "There'll be no cook or housekeeper astir here these many hours yet; I question," added she, "they get up to-day."

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"What! they've been put to bed too, have they?" asked he.

"W-h-y no—not 'zactly that," drawled the woman; "but when sarvants are kept up three nights out of four, they must make up for lost time when they can."

"Well," mused Mr. Sponge, "this is a bother, at all events; get no breakfast, lose my hunt, and perhaps a billet into the bargain. Well, there's sixpence for you, my good woman," said he at length, drawing his hand out of his pocket, and handing her the contents through the window; adding, "don't make a beast of yourself with it."

"It's nabbut *fourpence*," observed the woman, holding it out on the palm of her hand.

"Ah, well, you're welcome to it whatever it is," replied our friend, turning his horse to go away. A thought then struck him. "Could you get me a pen and ink, think you?" asked he; "I want to write a line to Sir Harry."

"Pen and ink!" replied the woman, who had pocketed the groat and resumed her dusting; "I don't know where they keep no such things as penses and inkses."

"Most likely in the drawing-room or the sitting-room, or perhaps in the butler's pantry," observed Mr. Sponge.

"Well, you can come in and see," replied the woman, thinking there was no occasion to give herself any more trouble for the fourpenny-piece.

Our worthy friend sat on his horse a few seconds staring intently into the dining-room window, thinking that lapse of time might cause the fourpenny-piece to be sufficiently respected to procure him something like directions how to proceed as well to get rid of his horse, as to procure access to the house, the door of which stood frowningly shut. In this, however, he was mistaken, for no sooner had the woman uttered the words, "Well, you can come in and see," than she flaunted into the interior of the room, and commenced a regular series of assaults upon the furniture, throwing the hearth-rug over one chair back, depositing the fire-irons in another, rearing the steel fender up against the Carrara marble chimney-piece, and knocking things

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about in the independent way that servants treat unoffending furniture, when master and mistress are comfortably ensconced in bed. "Flop" went the duster again; "bang" went the furniture; "knock" this chair went against that, and she seemed bent upon putting all things into that happy state of sixes and sevens that characterises a sale of household furniture, when chairs mount tables, and the whole system of domestic economy is revolutionised. Seeing that he was not going to get anything more for his money, our friend at length turned his horse and found his way to the stables by the unerring drag of carriage-wheels. All things there being as matters were in the house, he put the redoubtable nag into a stall, and helped him to a liberal measure of oats out of the well-stored unlocked corn-bin. He then sought the back of the house by the worn flagged-way that connected it with the stables. The back yard was in the admired confusion that might be expected from the woman's account. Empty casks and hampers were piled and stowed away in all directions, while regiments of champagne and other bottles stood and lay about among blacking bottles, Seltzer-water bottles, boot-trees, bath-bricks, old brushes, and stumpt-up besoms. Several pair of dirty top-boots, most of them with the spurs on, were chucked into the shoe-house just as they had been taken off. The kitchen, into which our friend now entered, was in the same disorderly state. Numerous copper pans stood simmering on the charcoal stoves, and the jointless jack still revolved on the spit. A dirty slipshod girl sat sleeping, with her apron thrown over her head, which rested on the end of a table. The open door of the servants' hall hard by, disclosed a pile of dress and other clothes, which after mopping up the ale and other slops, would be carefully folded and taken back to the rooms of their respective owners.

"*Halloo!*" cried Mr. Sponge, shaking the sleeping girl by the shoulder, which caused her to start up, stare, and rub her eyes in wild affright. "*Halloo!*" repeated he, "what's happened you?"

"Oh, beg pardon, sir!" exclaimed she; "beg pardon,"

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continued she, clasping her hands ; " I'll never do so again, sir ; no, sir, I'll *never* do so again, *indeed I won't*."

She had just stolen a shape of blanc-mange, and thought she was caught.

" Then show me where I'll find pen and ink and paper," replied our friend.

" Oh, sir, I don't know nothin' about them," replied the girl ; "*indeed*, sir, *I don't* ;" thinking it was some other petty larceny he was inquiring about.

" Well, but you can tell me where to find a sheet of paper, surely ? " rejoined he.

" Oh, indeed, sir, I *can't*," replied she ; " I know nothin' about nothin' of the sort." Servants never do.

" What sort ? " asked Mr. Sponge, wondering at her vehemence.

" Well, sir, about what you said," sobbed the girl, applying the corner of her dirty apron to her eyes.

" Hang it, the girl's mad," rejoined our friend, brushing by, and making for the passage beyond. This brought him past the still room, the steward's room, the housekeeper's room, and the butler's pantry. All were in most glorious confusion ; in the latter, Captain Cutitfat's lacquer-toed, lavender-coloured dress boots were reposing in the silver soup tureen, and Captain Bouncey's varnished pumps were stuffed into a wine-cooler. The last detachment of empty bottles stood or lay about the floor, commingling with boot-jacks, knife-trays, bath-bricks, coat-brushes, candle-end boxes, plates, lanterns, lamp glasses, oil bottles, corkscrews, wine strainers—the usual miscellaneous appendages of a butler's pantry. All was still and quiet ; not a sound, save the loud ticking of a timepiece, or the occasional creak of a jarring door, disturbed the solemn silence of the house. A nimble-handed mugger or tramp might have carried off whatever he liked.

Passing onward, Mr. Sponge came to a red-baized, brass-nailed door, which, opening freely on a patent spring, revealed the fine proportions of a light picture-gallery with which the bright mahogany doors of the entertaining-rooms communicated.

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Opening the first door he came to, our friend found himself in the elegant drawing-room, on whose round bird's-eye-maple table, in the centre, were huddled all the unequal-lengthed candles of the previous night's illumination. It was a handsome apartment, fitted up in the most costly style; with rose-colour brocaded satin damask, the curtains trimmed with silk tassel fringe, and ornamented with massive bullion tassels on cornices, Cupids supporting wreaths under an arch, with open carved work and enrichments in burnished gold. The room, save the muster of the candles, was just as it had been left; and the richly gilt sofa still retained the indentations of the sitters, with the luxurious down pillows left as they had been supporting their backs.

The room reeked of tobacco, and the ends and ashes of cigars dotted the tables and white marble chimney-piece, and the gilt slabs and the finely-flowered Tournay carpet, just as the fires of gipsies dot and disfigure the fair face of a country. Costly china and nick-nacks of all sorts were scattered about in profusion. Altogether, it was a beautiful room.

"No want of money, here" said Mr. Sponge to himself, as he eyed it, and thought what havoc Gustavus James would make among the ornaments if he had a chance.

He then looked about for pen, ink, and paper. These were distributed so wide apart as to show the little request they were in. Having at length succeeded in getting what he wanted gathered together, Mr. Sponge sat down on the luxurious sofa, considering how he should address his host, as he hoped. Mr. Sponge was not a shy man, but, considering the circumstances under which he made Sir Harry Scattercash's acquaintance, together with his design upon his hospitality—above all, considering the crew by whom Sir Harry was surrounded—it required some little tact to pave the way without raising the present inmates of the house against him. There are no people so anxious to protect others from robbery as those who are robbing them themselves. Mr. Sponge thought, and thought, and thought. At last he resolved to write on the subject of the hounds. After sundry attempts

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on pink, blue, and green-tinted paper, he at last succeeded in hitting off the following, on yellow :—

“NONSUCH HOUSE.

“DEAR SIR HARRY,

“I rode over this morning, hearing you were to hunt, and am sorry to find you indisposed. I wish you would drop me a line to Mr. Crowdey's, Puddingpote Bower, saying when next you go out, as I should much like to have another look at your splendid pack, before I leave this country, which I fear will have to be soon.

“Yours in haste,

“H. SPONGE.

“P.S.—I hope you all got safe home the other night from Mr. Peastraw's.”

Having put this into a richly-gilt and embossed envelope, our friend directed it conspicuously to Sir Harry Scattercash, Bart., and stuck it in the centre of the mantel-piece. He then retraced his steps through the back regions, informing the sleeping beauty he had before disturbed, and who was now busy scouring a pan, that he had left a letter in the drawing-room for Sir Harry, and if she would see that he got it, he (Mr. Sponge) would remember her the next time he came, which he inwardly hoped would be soon. He then made for the stable, and got his horse, to go home, sauntering more leisurely along than one would expect of a man who had not got his breakfast, especially one riding a hack hunter.

The truth was, Mr. Sponge did not much like the aspect of affairs. Sir Harry's was evidently a desperately “fast” house; added to which, the guests by whom he was surrounded were clearly of the wide-awake order, who could not spare any pickings for a stranger. Indeed, Mr. Sponge felt that they rather cold-shouldered him at Farmer Peastraw's, and were in a greater hurry to be off when the drag came, than the mere difference between inside and outside seats required. He much questioned whether he got into Sir Harry's at all. If it came to a vote, he thought he should not. Then, what was he to

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do? Old Jog was clearly tired of him ; and he had nowhere else to go to. The thought made him stick spurs into the chestnut, and hurry home to Puddingpote Bower, where he endeavoured to soothe his host by more than insinuating that he was going on a visit to Nonsuch House. Jog inwardly prayed that he might.



Domestic Economy of Nonsuch House.

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CHAPTER LVIII.

THE DEBATE.



T was just as Mr. Sponge predicted with regard to his admission to Nonsuch House. The first person who spied his note to Sir Harry Scattercash was Captain Seedeybuck, who, going into the drawing-room, the day after Mr. Sponge's visit, to look for the top of his cigar-case, saw it occupying the centre of the mantel-piece. Having mastered its contents, the captain refolded and placed it where he found it, with the simple observation to himself of—"that cock won't fight."

Captain Quod saw it next, then Captain Bouncey, who told Captain Cutitfat what was in it, who agreed with Bouncey that it wouldn't do to have Mr. Sponge there.

Indeed, it seemed agreed on all hands that their party rather wanted weeding than increasing.

Thus, in due time, everybody in the house knew the contents of the note save Sir Harry, though none of them thought it worth while telling him of it. On the third morning, however, as the party were assembling for breakfast, he came into the room reading it.

"This (hiccup) note ought to have been delivered before," observed he, holding it up.

"Indeed, my dear," replied Lady Scattercash, who was sitting gloriously fine and very beautiful at the head of the table, "I don't know anything about it."

"Who is it from?" asked brother Bob Spangles.

"Mr. (hiccup) Sponge," replied Sir Harry.

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"What a name!" exclaimed Captain Seedybuck.

"Who is he?" asked Captain Quod.

"Don't know," replied Sir Harry; "he writes to (hiccup) about the hounds."

"Oh, it'll be that brown-booted buffer," observed Captain Bouncey, "that we left at old Peastraw's."

"No doubt," assented Captain Cutitfat; adding, "what business has he with the hounds?"

"He wants to know when we are going to (hiccup) again," observed Sir Harry.

"Does he?" replied Captain Seedybuck. "That, I suppose, will depend upon Watchorn."

The party now got settled to breakfast, and as soon as the first burst of appetite was appeased, the conversation again turned upon our friend Mr. Sponge.

"Who is this Mr. Sponge?" asked Captain Bouncey, the billiard-marker, with the air of a thorough exclusive.

Nobody answered.

"Who's your friend?" asked he of Sir Harry direct.

"Don't know," replied Sir Harry, from between the mouthfuls of a highly cayenned grill.

"P'raps a bolting betting-office keeper," suggested Captain Ladofwax, who hated Captain Bouncey.

"He looks more like a glazier, I think," retorted Captain Bouncey, with a look of defiance at the speaker.

"Lucky if he is one," retorted Captain Ladofwax, reddening up to the eyes; "he may have a chance of repairing somebody's daylight." The captain raising his saucer, to discharge it at his opponent's head.

"*Gently with the cheney!*" exclaimed Lady Scattercash, who was too much used to such scenes to care about the belligerents. Bob Spangles caught Ladofwax's arm at the nick of time, and saved the saucer.

"Hout! you (hiccup) fellows are always (hiccup)ing," exclaimed Sir Harry. "I declare I'll have you both (hiccup)ed over to keep the peace."

They then broke out into wordy recrimination and abuse,

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each declaring that he wouldn't stay a day longer in the house if the other remained; but as they had often said so before, and still gave no symptoms of going, their assertion produced little effect upon anybody. Sir Harry would not have cared if all his guests had gone together. Peace and order being at length restored, the conversation again turned upon Mr. Sponge.

"I suppose we must have another (hiccup) hunt soon," observed Sir Harry.

"In course," replied Bob Spangles; "it's no use keeping the hungry brutes unless you work them."

"You'll have a bagman, I presume," observed Captain Seedybuck, who did not like the trouble of travelling about the country to draw for a fox.

"Oh, yes," replied Sir Harry; "Watchorn will manage all that. He's always (hiccup) in that line. We'd better have a hunt soon, and then, Mr. (hiccup) Bugles, you can see it." Sir Harry addressing himself to a gentleman he was as anxious to get rid of as Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey was to get rid of Mr. Sponge.

"No; Mr. Bugles won't go out any more," replied Lady Scattercash, peremptorily. "He was nearly killed last time;" her ladyship casting an angry glance at her husband, and a very loving one on the object of her solicitude.

"Oh, nought's never in danger!" observed Bob Spangles.

"Then *you* can go, Bob," snapped his sister.

"I intend," replied Bob.

"Then (hiccup), gentlemen, I think I'll just write this Mr. (hiccup) What's-his-name to (hiccup) over here," observed Sir Harry, "and then he'll be ready for the (hiccup) hunt whenever we choose to (hiccup) one."

The proposition fell still-born among the party.

"Don't you think we can do without him?" at last suggested Captain Seedybuck.

"I think so," observed the elder Spangles, without looking up from his plate.

"Who is it?" asked Lady Scattercash.

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“The man that was here the other morning—the man in the queer chestnut-coloured boots,” replied Mr. Orlando Bugles.

“Oh, I think he’s rather good-looking; I vote we have him,” replied her ladyship.

That was rather a damper for Sir Harry; but upon reflection, he thought he could not be worse off with Mr. Sponge and Mr. Bugles than he was with Mr. Bugles alone; so, having finished a poor appetiteless breakfast, he repaired to what he called his “study,” and with a feeble, shaky hand, scrawled an invitation to Mr. Sponge to come over to Nonsuch House, and take his chance of a run with his hounds. He then sealed and posted the letter without further to-do.

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CHAPTER LIX.

FACEY ROMFORD.



Mr. Facey Romford.

FOUR days had now elapsed since Mr. Sponge penned his overture to Sir Harry, and each succeeding day satisfied him more of the utter impossibility of holding on much longer in his then billet at Puddingpote Bower. Not only was Jog coarse and incessant in his hints to him to be off, but, Jawleyford-like, he had lowered the standard of entertainment so greatly, that if it

hadn't been that Mr. Sponge had his servant and horses kept also, he might as well have been living at his own expense. The company lights were all extinguished; great, strong-smelling, cauliflower-headed moulds, that were always wanting snuffing, usurped the place of Belmont wax; napkins were withdrawn; second-hand table-cloths introduced; marsala did duty for sherry; and the stick-jaw pudding assumed a consistency that was almost incompatible with articulation.

In the course of this time Sponge wrote to Puffington, saying if he was better he would return and finish his visit; but the wary Puff sent a messenger off express with a note, lamenting that he was ordered to Handley Cross for his health, but, "pop'lar man" like, hoping that the pleasure of Sponge's company was only deferred for another season. Jawleyford, even Sponge thought hopeless; and, altogether, he was very much perplexed. He had made a little money, certainly, with

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his horses ; but a permanent investment of his elegant person, such as he had long been on the look-out for, seemed as far off as ever. On the afternoon of the fifth day, as he was taking a solitary stroll about the country, having about made up his mind to be off to town, just as he was crossing Jog's buttercup meadow on his way to the stable, a rapid *bang ! bang !* caused him to start, and, looking over the hedge, he saw a brawny-looking sportsman in brown reloading his gun, with a brace of liver and white setters crouching like statues in the stubble.

"Seek dead !" presently said the shooter, with a slight wave of his hand ; and in an instant each dog was picking up his bird.

"I'll have a word with you," said Sponge, "on and off-ing" the hedge, his beat causing the shooter to start and look as if inclined for a run ; second thoughts said Sponge was too near, and he'd better brave it.

"What sport ?" asked Sponge, striding towards him.

"Oh, pretty middling," replied the shooter, a great red-headed, freckley-faced fellow, with backward-lying whiskers, crowned in a drab rustic. "Oh, pretty middling," repeated he, not knowing whether to act on the friendly or defensive.

"Fine day !" said Sponge, eyeing his fox-maskey whiskers and stout, muscular frame.

"It is," replied the shooter ; adding, "Just followed my birds over the boundary. No 'fence, I s'pose—no 'fence."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Sponge. "Jog, I des-say, 'll be very glad to see you."

"Oh, you'll be Mr. Sponge," observed the stranger, jumping to a conclusion.

"I am," replied our hero ; adding, "May I ask who I have the honour of addressing ?"

"My name's Romford—Charley Romford ; everybody knows me. Very glad to make your 'quaintance," tendering Sponge a great, rough, heavy hand. "I was goin' to call upon you," observed the stranger, as he ceased swinging Sponge's arm to and fro like a pump-handle ; "I was goin' to call upon you, to see if you'd come over to Washingforde and have some shootin' at me oncle's—Oncle Gilroy's, at Queercove Hill."

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"*Most happy!*" exclaimed Sponge, thinking it was the very thing he wanted.

"Get a day with the harriers, too, if you like," continued the shooter, increasing the temptation.

"Better still!" thought Sponge.

"I've only bachelor 'commodation to offer you; but p'raps you'll not mind roughing it a bit?" observed Romford.

"Oh, faith, not I!" replied Sponge, thinking of the luxuries of Puffington's bachelor habitation. "What sort of stables have you?" asked our friend.

"Capital stables—excellent stables!" replied the shooter; "stalls six feet in the clear, by twelve dip (deep), iron racks, oak stall-posts covered with zinc, beautiful oats, capital beans, splendacious hay—won without a shower!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Sponge, thinking he had lit on his legs, and might snap his fingers at Jog and his hints. He'd take the high hand, and give Jog up.

"*I'm your man!*" said Sponge in high glee.

"When will you come?" asked Romford.

"*To-morrow!*" replied Sponge, firmly.

"So be it," rejoined his proffered host; and, with another hearty swing of the arm, the newly made friends parted.

Charley Romford, or Facey, as he was commonly called, from his being the admitted most impudent man in the country, was a great round-faced, coarse-featured, prize-fighting sort of fellow, who lived chiefly by his wits, which he exercised in all the legitimate lines of industry—poaching, betting, boxing, horse-dealing, cards, quoits—anything that came uppermost. That he was a man of enterprise, we need hardly add, when he had formed a scheme for doing our Sponge—a man that we do not think any of our readers would trouble themselves to try a "plant" upon.

This impudent Facey, as if in contradiction of terms, was originally intended for a civil engineer; but having early in life voted himself heir to his uncle, Mr. Gilroy, of Queercove Hill, a great cattle-jobber, with a small "independence of his own"—three hundred a year, perhaps, which a kind world

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called six—Facey thought he would just hang about until his uncle was done with his shoes, and then be lord of Queercove Hill.

Now, “me Oncle Gilroy,” of whom Facey was constantly talking, had a left-handed wife and promising family in the sylvan retirement of St: John’s Wood, whither he used to retire after his business in “Smi’fiel’” was over; so that Facey, for once, was out in his calculations. Gilroy, however, being as knowing as “his nevvey,” as he called him, just encouraged Facey in his shooting, fishing, and idle propensities generally, doubtless finding it more convenient to have his fish and game for nothing than to pay for them.

Facey, having the apparently inexhaustible sum of a thousand pounds, began life as a fox-hunter—in a very small way, to be sure—more for the purpose of selling horses than anything else; but, having succeeded in “doing” all the do-able gentlemen, both with the “Tip and Go” and Cranerfield hounds, his occupation was gone, it requiring an extended field—such as our friend Sponge roamed—to carry on cheating in horses for any length of time. Facey was soon blown, his name in connection with a horse being enough to prevent any one looking at him. Indeed, we question that there is any less desirable mode of making, or trying to make money, than by cheating or even dealing in horses. Many people fancy themselves cheated, whatever they get; while the man who is really cheated never forgets it, and proclaims it to the end of time. Moreover, no one can go on cheating in horses for any length of time, without putting himself in the power of his groom; and let those who have seen how servants lord it over each other say how they would like to subject themselves to similar treatment.—But to our story.

Facey Romford had now a splendid milk-white horse, well-known in Mr. Nobbington’s and Lord Leader’s hunts as Mr. Hobler, but who Facey kindly rechristened the “Nonpareil,” which the now rising price of oats, and falling state of his finances, made him particularly anxious to get rid of, ere the horse performed the equestrian feat of “eating its head off.”

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He was a very hunter-like looking horse, but his misfortune consisted in having such shocking seedy toes that he couldn't keep his shoes on. If he got through the first field with them on, they were sure to be off at the fence. This horse Facey voted to be the very thing for Mr. Sponge, and hearing that he had come into the country to hunt, it occurred to him that it would be a capital thing if he could get him to take Mother Overend's spare bed and lodge with him, twelve shillings a-week being more than Facey liked paying for his rooms. Not that he paid twelve shillings for the rooms alone; on the contrary, he had a two-stalled stable, with a sort of kennel for his pointers, and a sty for his pig into the bargain. This pig, which was eaten many times in anticipation, had at length fallen a victim to the butcher, and Facey's larder was uncommonly well found in black-puddings, sausages, spare-ribs, and other the component parts of a pig: so that he was in very hospitable circumstances,—at least, in his rough and ready idea of what hospitality ought to be. Indeed, whether he had or not, he'd have risked it, being quite as good at carrying things off with a high hand as Mr. Sponge himself.

The invitation came most opportunely; for worn out with jealousy and watching, Jog had made up his mind to cut to Australia, and when Sponge returned after meeting Facey, Jog was in the act of combing out an advertisement, offering all that desirable sporting residence called Puddingpote Bower, with the coach house, stables, and offices thereunto belonging, to let, and announcing that the whole of the valuable household furniture, comprising mahogany, dining, loo, card, and Pembroke tables; sofa, couch, and chairs in hair seating; cheffonier, with plate glass; book-case; flower-stands; piano-forte, by Collard and Collard; music-stool and Canterbury; chimney and pier-glasses; mirror; ormolu time-piece; alabaster and wax figures and shades; China; Brussels carpets and rugs; fenders and fire-irons; curtains and cornices; Venetian blinds; mahogany four-post, French, and camp bedsteads; feather beds; hair mattresses; mahogany chest of drawers; dressing-glasses; wash and dressing-tables; patent shower bath; bed and

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table linen ; dinner and tea-ware ; warming-pans, &c., would be exposed to immediate and unreserved sale.

How gratefully Sponge's inquiry if he knew Mr. Romford fell on his ear, as they sat moodily together after dinner over some very low-priced port.

"Oh, yes (puff)—oh, yes (wheeze)—oh, yes (gasp) ! Know Charley Romford—*Facey*, as they call him. He's (puff, wheeze, gasp), heir to old Mr. Gilroy, of Queercove Hill."

"Just so," rejoined Sponge,—“just so ; that's the man,—stout, square-built fellow, with backward-growing whiskers. I'm going to stay with him to shoot at old Gils. Where does Charley live ! ”

"Live ?" exclaimed Jog, almost choked with delight at the information ; "live ! live !" repeated he, for the third time ; "lives at (puff, wheeze, gasp, cough), Washingforde—yes, at Washingforde ; 'bout ten miles from (puff, wheeze) here. *When d'ye go ?*"

"To-morrow," replied Sponge, with an air of offended dignity.

Jog was so rejoiced that he could hardly sit on his chair.

Mrs. Jog, when she heard it, felt that Gustavus James's chance of independence was gone ; for well she knew that Jog would never let Sponge come back to the Bower.

We need scarcely say that Jog was up betimes in the morning, most anxious to forward Mr. Sponge's departure. He offered to allow Bartholomew to convey him and his "traps" in the phaeton—an offer that Mr. Sponge availed himself of as far as his "traps" were concerned, though he preferred cantering over on his piebald to trailing along in Jog's jingling chay. So matters were arranged, and Mr. Sponge forthwith proceeded to put his brown boots, his substantial cords, his superfine tights, his cuttey scarlet, his dress blue saxony, his clean linen, his heavy spurs, and though last, not least in importance, his now backless "Mogg," into his solid leather portmanteau, sweeping the surplus of his wardrobe into a capacious carpet bag. While the guest was thus busy up-stairs, the host wandered about restlessly, now stirring up this person,

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now hurrying that, in the full enjoyment, of the much-coveted departure. His pleasure was, perhaps, rather damped by a running commentary he overheard through the lattice-window of the stable, from Leather, as he stripped his horses and tried to roll up their clothing in a moderate compass.

“ ‘Ord rot your great carcass ! ” exclaimed he, giving the roll a hearty kick in its bulging-out stomach, on finding that he had not got it as small as he wanted. “ ‘Ord rot your great carcass,” repeated he, scratching his head and eyeing it as it lay ; “ this is all the consequence of your nasty brewers’ hapron weshins,—blowin’ of one out, like a bladder ! ” and, thereupon, he placed his hand on his stomach to feel how his own was. “ Never see’d sich a house, or sich an *awful* mean man ! ” continued he, stooping and pommelling the package with his fists. It was of no use, he could not get it as small as he wished—“ Must have my jacket out on you, I do believe,” added he, seeing where the impediment was ; “ sticks in your gizzard just like a lump of old Puff-and-blow’s puddin’ ; ” and then he thrust his hand into the folds of the clothing, and pulled out the greasy garment. “ Now,” said he, stooping again, “ I think we may manish ye ; ” and he took the roll in his arms and hoisted it on to Hercules, whom he meant to make the led horse, observing aloud, as he adjusted it on the saddle, and whacked it well with his hands to make it lie right, “ I *wish* it was old Jog—*wouldn’t I sarve him out !* ” He then turned his horses round in their stalls, tucked his greasy jacket under the flap of the saddle-bags, took his ash-stick from the crook, and led them out of the capacious door. Jog looked at him with mingled feelings of disgust and delight. Leather just gave his old hat flipe a rap with his forefinger as he passed with the horses—a salute that Jog did not condescend to return.

Having eyed the receding horses with great satisfaction, Jog re-entered the house by the kitchens, to have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Sponge off. He found the portmanteau and carpet bag standing in the passage ; and just at the moment the sound of the phaeton wheels fell on his ear, as Bartholomew drove round from the coach-house to the door. Mr. Sponge

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was already in the parlour, making his adieus to Mrs. Jog and the children, who were all assembled for the purpose.

"What, are you goin'?" (puff) asked Jog, with an air of surprise.

"Yes," replied Mr. Sponge; adding, as he tendered his hand, "the best friends must part, you know."

"Well (puff), but you'd better have your (wheeze) horse round," observed Jog, anxious to avoid any overture for a return.

"Thankee," replied Mr. Sponge, making a parting bow; "I'll get him at the stable."

"I'll go with you," said Jog, leading the way.

Leather had saddled, and bridled, and turned him round in the stall, with one of Mr. Jog's blanket-rugs on, which Mr. Sponge just swept over his tail into the manger, and led the horse out.

"Adieu!" said he, offering his hand to his host.

"Good-bye!—good (puff) sport to you," said Jog, shaking it heartily.

Mr. Sponge then mounted his hack, and cocking out his toe, rode off at a canter.

At the same moment, Bartholomew drove away from the front door; and Jog, having stood watching the phaeton over the rise of Pennypound Hill, scraped his feet, re-entered his house, and rubbing them heartily on the mat as he closed the sash-door, observed aloud to himself, with a jerk of his head—

"Well, now, that's the most (puff) impittent feller I ever saw in my life! Catch me (gasp) godpapa-hunting again."

CHAPTER LX.

THE ADJOURNED DEBATE.



THE fatal invitation to Mr. Sponge having been sent, the question that now occupied the minds of the assembled sharpers at Nonsuch House, was, whether he was a "pigeon," or one of themselves. That point occupied their very deep and serious consideration. If he was a "pigeon," they could clearly accommodate him, but if, on the other hand, he was one of themselves, it was painfully apparent that there were far too many of them there already. Of course, the subject was not discussed in full and open conclave—they were all highly honourable men in the gross—and it was only in the small and secret groups of those accustomed to hunt together, and unburden their minds, that the real truth was elicited.

"What an ass Sir Harry is, to ask this Mr. Sponge," observed Captain Quod to Captain Seedybuck, as (cigar in mouth) they paced backwards and forwards under the flagged verandah on the west side of the house, on the morning that Sir Harry had announced his intention of asking him.

"*Confounded* ass," assented Seedybuck, from between the whiffs of his cigar.

"Dash it! one would think he had more money than he knew what to do with," observed the first speaker, "instead of not knowing where to lay hands on a halfpenny."

"Soon be *who-hoop* here," observed Quod, with a shake of the head.

"Fear so," replied Seedybuck. "Have you heard anything fresh?"



MISS HOWARD AND MISS GLITTERS.

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"Nothing particular. The County Court bailiff was here with some summonses, which, of course, he put in the fire."

"Ah! that's what he always does. He got tired of papering the smoking-room with them," replied Seedeybuck.

"Well, it's a pity," observed Quod, spitting as he spoke; "but what can you expect, eaten up as he is by such a set of rubbish."

"Shockin'," replied Seedeybuck, thinking how long he and his friend might have fattened there together.

"Do you know anything of this Mr. Sponge?" asked Captain Quod, after a pause.

"Nothin'," replied Seedeybuck, "except what we saw of him here; but I'm sure he won't do."

"Well, I think not either," replied Quod; "I didn't like his looks—he seems quite one of the free-and-easy sort."

"Quite," observed Seedeybuck, determined to make a set against him, instead of cultivating his acquaintance.

"This Mr. Sponge won't be any great addition to our party, I think," muttered Captain Bouncey to Captain Cutitfat, as they stood within the bay of the library window, in apparent contemplation of the cows, but in reality conning the Sponge matter over in their minds.

"I think not," replied Captain Cutitfat, with an emphasis.

"Wonder what made Sir Harry ask him!" whispered Bouncey, adding, aloud, for the bystanders to hear, "That's a fine cow, isn't it?"

"Very," replied Cutitfat, in the same key; adding, in a whisper, with a shrug of his shoulders, "wonder what made him ask half the people that are here!"

"The black and white one isn't a bad 'un," observed Bouncey, nodding his head towards the cows, adding, in an undertone, "most of them asked themselves, I should think."

"Admiring the cows, Captain Bouncey?" asked the beautiful and tolerably virtuous Miss Glitters, of the Astley's Royal Amphitheatre, who had come down to spend a few days with her old friend, Lady Scattercash. "Admiring the cows,

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Captain Bouncey?" asked she, sidling her elegant figure between our friends in the bay.

"We were just saying how nice it would be to have two or three pretty girls, and a sillabub, under those cedars," replied Captain Bouncey.

"Oh, charming!" exclaimed Miss Glitters, her dark eyes sparkling as she spoke. "Harriet!" exclaimed she, addressing herself to a young lady, who called herself Howard, but whose real name was Brown—Jane Brown. "Harriet!" exclaimed she, "Captain Bouncey is going to give a *fête champêtre* under those lovely cedars."

"Oh, how nice!" exclaimed Harriet, clapping her hands in ecstasies—theatrical ecstasies at least.

"It must be Sir Harry," replied the billiard-table man, not fancying being "let in" for anything.

"Oh! Sir Harry will let us have anything we like, I'm sure," rejoined Miss Glitters.

"What is it (hiccup)?" asked Sir Harry, who, hearing his name, now joined the party.

"Oh, we want you to give us a dance under those charming cedars," replied the lady, looking lovingly at him.

"Cedars!" hiccuped Sir Harry, "where do you see any cedars?"

"Why, there," replied Miss Glitters, nodding towards a clump of evergreens.

"Those are (hiccup) hollies," replied Sir Harry.

"Well, under the hollies," rejoined Miss Glitters; adding, "it was Captain Bouncey who said they were cedars."

"Ah, I meant those beyond," observed the captain, nodding in another direction.

"Those are (hiccup) Scotch firs," rejoined Sir Harry.

"Well, never mind what they are," resumed the lady; "let us have a dance under them."

"Certainly," replied Sir Harry, who was always ready for anything.

"We shall have plenty of partners," observed Miss Howard, recollecting how many men there were in the house.

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"And another coming," observed Captain Cutitfat, still fretting at the idea.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Howard, raising her hands and eyebrows in delight; "and who is he?" asked she, with unfeigned glee.

"Oh, such a (hiccup) swell," replied Sir Harry; "reg'lar Leicestershire man. A (hiccup) Quornite in fact."

"We'll not have the dance till he comes, then," observed Miss Glitters.

"No more we will," said Miss Howard, withdrawing from the group.

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CHAPTER LXI.

FACEY ROMFORD AT HOME.



WE will now suppose our distinguished Sponge entering the village, or what the natives call the town of Washingforde, towards the close of a short December day, on his arrival from Mr. Jog's.

"What sort of stables are there?" asked he, reining up his hack, as he encountered the brandy-nosed Leather airing himself on the main street.

"Stables be good enough—forage, too," replied the stud groom,—"*per-wided* you likes the sittivation."

"Oh, the sittivation 'll be good enough," retorted Sponge, thinking that, groom-like, Leather was grumbling because he hadn't got the best stables.

"Well, sir, as you please," replied the man.

"Why, where are they?" asked Sponge, seeing there was more in Leather's manner than met the eye.

"*Rose and Crown!*" replied Leather, with an emphasis.

"*Rose and Crown!*" exclaimed Sponge, starting in his saddle; "Rose and Crown! Why, I'm going to stay with Mr. Romford!"

"So he said," replied Leather; "so he said. I met him as I com'd in with the osses, and said he to me, said he, 'You'll find captle quarters at the Crown!'"

"*The deuce!*" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, dropping the reins on his hack's neck; "*the deuce!*" repeated he, with a look of disgust. "Why, where does he live?"

"'Bove the saddler's, thonder," replied Leather, nodding to

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a small bow-windowed white house a little lower down, with the gilt-lettered words :—

OVEREND,

SADDLER AND HARNESS-MAKER
TO THE QUEEN,

above a very meagrely stocked shop.

"*The devil!*" replied Mr. Sponge, boiling up, as he eyed the cottage-like dimensions of the place.

The dialogue was interrupted by a sledge-hammer-like blow on Sponge's back, followed by such a proffered hand as could proceed from none but his host.

"Glad to see ye!" exclaimed Facey, swinging Sponge's arm to and fro. "Get off!" continued he, half dragging him down, "and let's go in; for it's beastly cold, and dinner 'll be ready in no time!"

So saying, he led the captive Sponge down street, like a prisoner, by the arm, and, opening the thin house-door, pushed him up a very straight staircase into a little low cabin-like room, hung with boxing-gloves, foils, and pictures of fighters and ballet girls.

"Glad to see ye!" again said Facey, poking the diminutive fire. "Axed Nosey Nickel and Gutty Weazel to meet you," continued he, looking at the little "dinner-for-two" table; "but Nosey's gone wrong in a tooth, and Gutty's away sweet-heartin'. However, we'll be very cozey and jolly together; and if you want to wash your hands, or anything afore dinner, I'll show you your bedroom," continued he, backing Sponge across the staircase landing to where a couple of little black doors opened into rooms, formed by dividing what had been the duplicate of the sitting-room into two.

"There!" exclaimed Facey, pointing to Sponge's portman-teau and bag, standing midway between the window and door :—"There! there are your traps. Yonder's the washhand-stand. You can put your shavin'-things on the chair below the lookin'-glass 'gainst the wall," pointing to a fragment of glass nailed

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against the stencilled wall, all of which Sponge stood eyeing with a mingled air of resignation and contempt; but when Facey pointed to—

“The chest, contrived a double debt to pay—
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day;”

and said that was where Sponge would have to curl himself up, our friend shook his head, and declared he could not.

“Oh, fiddle!” replied Facey. “Jack Weatherley slept in it for months, and he’s half a hand higher than you—sixteen hands, if he’s an inch.” And Sponge jerked his head and bit his lips, thinking he was “done” for once.”

“W-h-o-y, ar thought you’d been a fox-hunter,” observed Facey, seeing his guest’s disconcerted look.

“Well, but bein’ a fox-hunter won’t enable one to sleep in a band-box, or to shut one’s self up like a telescope,” retorted the indignant Sponge.

“Ord hang it, man! you’re so nasty partickler,” rejoined Facey; “you’re so nasty partickler. You’ll never do to go out duck-shootin’ i’ your shirt. Dash it, man! Oncle Gilroy would disinherit me if ar was such a chap. However, look sharp,” continued he, “if you are goin’ to clean yourself; for dinner’ll be ready in no time, indeed, I hear Mrs. End dishin’ it up.” So saying, Facey rolled out of the room, and Sponge presently heard him pulling off his clogs of shoes in the adjoining one. Dinner spoke for itself, for the house reeked with the smell of fried onions and roast pork.

Now, Sponge didn’t like pork; and there was nothing but pork, or pig in one shape or another. Spare-ribs, liver and bacon, sausages, black puddings, &c.,—all very good in their way, but which came with a bad grace after the comforts of Jog’s, the elegance of Puffington’s, and the early splendour of Jawleyford’s. Our hero was a good deal put out, and felt as if he was imposed upon. What business had a man like this to ask him to stay with him—a man who dined by daylight, and ladled his meat with a great two-pronged fork?

Facey, though he saw Mr. Sponge wasn’t pleased, praised

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and pressed everything in succession down to a very strong cheese; and as the slip-shod girl whisked away crumbs and all in the coarse table-cloth, he exclaimed with a most open-hearted air, "Well, now, what shall we have to drink?" adding, "You smoke, of course—shall it be gin, rum, or Hollands—Hollands, rum, or gin?"

Sponge was half inclined to propose wine, but recollecting what sloe-juice sort of stuff it was sure to be, and that Facey, in all probability, would make him finish it, he just replied, "Oh, I don't care; 'spose we say gin?"

"Gin be it," said Facey, rising from his seat, and making for a little closet in the wall, he produced a bottle labelled "Fine London Spirit;" and, hallooing to the girl to get a few "Captins'" out of the box under his bed, he scattered a lot of glasses about the table, and placed a green dessert-dish for the biscuits against they came.

Night had now closed in—a keen, boisterous, wintry night, making the pocketful of coals that ornamented the grate peculiarly acceptable.

"B-o-y Jove, what a night!" exclaimed Facey, as a blash of sleet dashed across the window, as if some one had thrown a handful of pebbles against it. "B-o-y Jove, what a night!" repeated he, rising and closing the shutters, and letting down the little scanty red curtain. "Let us draw in and have a hot brew," continued he, stirring the fire under the kettle, and handing a lot of cigars out of the table-drawer. They then sat smoking and sipping, and smoking and sipping, each making a mental estimate of the other.

"Shall we have a game at cards? or what shall we do to pass the evenin'?" at length asked our host. "Better have a game at cards, p'raps," continued he.

"Thank'ee, no; thank'ee, no. I've a book in my pocket," replied Sponge, diving into his jacket-pocket; adding, as he fished up his Mogg, "always carry a book of light reading about with me."

"What, you're a literary cove, are you?" asked Facey, in a tone of surprise.



MR. ROMFORD TREATS SPONGE TO A LITTLE MUSIC.

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"Not exactly that," replied Sponge; "but I like to improve my mind." He then opened the valuable work, taking a dip into the Omnibus Guide—"Brentford, 7 from Hyde Park Corner—European Coffee House, near the Bank, daily," and so worked his way on through the "Brighton Railway Station, Brixton, Bromley both in Kent and Middlesex, Bushey Heath, Camberwell, Camden Town, and Carshalton," right into Cheam, when Facey, who had been eyeing him intently, not at all relishing his style of proceeding and wishing to be doing, suddenly exclaimed, as he darted up—

"B-o-y Jove! You've not heard me play the flute! No more you have. Dash it, how remiss!" continued he, making for the little book-shelf on which it lay; adding, as he blew into it and sucked the joints, "you're musical, of course?"

"Oh, I can stand music," muttered Sponge, with a jerk of his head, as if a tune was neither here nor there with him.

"By Jingo! you should see me Oncle Gilroy, when a'r'm playin'! The old man act'ly sheds tears of delight—he's so pleased."

"Indeed," replied Sponge, now passing on into Mogg's Cab Fares—"Aldersgate Street, Hare Court, to or from Bagnigge-Wells," and so on, when Facey struck up the most squeaking, discordant, broken-winded

"Jump Jim Crow,"

that ever was heard, making the sensitive Sponge shudder, and setting all his teeth on edge.

"Hang me, but that flute of yours wants nitre, or a dose of physic, or something most dreadful!" at length exclaimed he, squeezing up his face as if in the greatest agony, as he laboured—

"Jump about and wheel about"

completely threw Sponge over in his calculation as to what he could ride from Aldgate Pump to the Pied Bull at Islington for.

"Oh, no!" replied Facey, with an air of indifference, as he took off the end and jerked out the steam. "Oh, no—only wants work—only wants work," added he, putting it together

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again, exclaiming, as he looked at the now sulky Sponge, "Well, what shall it be?"

"Whatever you please," replied our friend, dipping frantically into his Mogg.

"Well, then, I'll play you me oncle's favourite tune, 'The Merry Swiss Boy,'" whereupon Facey set to most vigorously with that once most popular air. It, however, came off as rustily as "Jim Crow," for whose feats Facey evidently had a partiality; for no sooner did he get squeaked through "me oncle's" tune than he returned to the nigger melody with redoubled zeal, and puffed and blew Sponge's calculations as to what he could ride from "Mother Redcap's" at Camden Town down Liquorpond Street, up Snow Hill, and so on, to the "Angel" in Ratcliffe Highway for, clean out of his head. Nor did there seem any prospect of relief, for no sooner did Facey get through one tune than he "was" at the other again.

"Rot it!" at length exclaimed Sponge, throwing his "Mogg" from him in despair, "you'll deafen me with that abominable noise."

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed Facey, in well-feigned surprise, "Bless my heart! Why, I thought you liked music, my dear feller;" adding, "I was playin' to please you."

"The deuce you were!" snapped Mr. Sponge, "I wish I'd known sooner: I'd have saved you a deal of wind."

"Why, my dear feller," replied Facey, "I wished to entertain you the best in my power. One must do somethin', you know."

"I'd rather do anything than undergo that horrid noise," replied Sponge, ringing his left ear with his forefinger.

"Let's have a game at cards, then," rejoined Facey, soothingly, seeing he had sufficiently agonised Sponge.

"Cards," replied Mr. Sponge. "Cards," repeated he, thoughtfully, stroking his hairy chin. "Cards," added he, for the third time, as he conned Facey's rotund visage, and wondered if he was a sharper. If the cards were fair, Sponge didn't care trying his luck. It all depended upon that. "Well," said he, in a tone of indifference, as he picked up

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his "Mogg," thinking he wouldn't pay if he lost, "I'll give you a turn. What shall it be?"

"Oh—w-h-o-y—s'pose we say *écarté*?" replied Facey, in an off-hand sort of way.

"Well," drawled Sponge, pocketing his "Mogg," preparatory to action.

"You haven't a clean pack, have you?" asked Sponge, as Facey, diving into a drawer, produced a very dirty, thumb-marked set.

"W-h-o-y, no, I haven't," replied Facey. "W-h-o-y, no, I haven't: but, honour bright, these are all right and fair. Wouldn't cheat a man, if it was ever so."

"Sure you wouldn't," replied Sponge, nothing comforted by the assertion.

They then resumed their seats opposite each other at the little table, with the hot water and sugar, and "Fine London Spirit" bottle, equitably placed between them.

At first Mr. Sponge was the victor, and by nine o'clock had scored eight-and-twenty shillings against his host, when he was inclined to leave off, alleging that he was an early man, and would go to bed—an arrangement that Facey seemed to come into, only pressing Sponge to accompany the gin he was now helping himself to with another cigar. This seemed all fair and reasonable; and as Sponge conned matters over, through the benign influence of the "'baccy," he really thought Facey mightn't be such a bad beggar after all.

"Well, then," said he, as he finished cigar and glass together, "if you'll give me eight-and-twenty-bob, I'll be off to bedfordshire."

"You'll give me my revenge, surely!" exclaimed Facey, in pretended astonishment.

"*To-morrow night*," replied Sponge firmly, thinking it would have to go hard with him if he remained there to give it.

"Nay, *now*!" rejoined Facey, adding, "it's quite early. Me Oncle Gilroy and I always play much later at Queercove Hill."

Sponge hesitated. If he had got the money, he would

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have refused point-blank; as it was, he thought, perhaps, the only chance of getting it was to go on. With no small reluctance and misgivings he mixed himself another tumbler of gin and water, and, changing seats, resumed the game. Nor was our discreet friend far wrong in his calculations, for luck now changed, and Facey seemed to have the king quite at command. In less than an hour, he had not only wiped off the eight-and-twenty shillings, but had scored three pound fifteen against his guest. Facey would now leave off. Sponge, on the other hand, wanted to go on. Facey, however, was firm. "I'll cut you double or quits, then," cried Sponge, in rash despair. Facey accommodated him and doubled the debt.

"*Again!*" exclaimed Sponge, with desperate energy.

"*No!* no more, thank ye," replied Facey, coolly. "Fair play's a jewel."

"So it is," assented Mr. Sponge, thinking he hadn't had it.

"Now," continued Facey, poking into the table-drawer and producing a dirty scrap of paper, with a little pocket ink-case, "if you'll give me an 'I. O. U.' we'll shut up shop."

"An 'I. O. U.!' " retorted Sponge, looking virtuously indignant. "An 'I. O. U.!' I'll give you your money in the mornin'."

"I know you will," replied Facey, coolly, putting himself in boxing attitude, exclaiming, as he measured out a distance, "just feel the biceps muscle of my arm—do believe I could fell an ox. However, never mind," continued he, seeing Sponge declined the feel. "Life's uncertain: so you give me an 'I. O. U.,' and we'll be all right and square. Short reckonin's make long friends, you know," added he, pointing peremptorily to the paper.

"I'd better give you a cheque at once," retorted Sponge, looking the very essence of chivalry.

"*Money*, if you please," replied Facey; muttering, with a jerk of his head, "*don't like paper.*"

The renowned Sponge, for once, was posed. He had the money, but he didn't like to part with it. So he gave the

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"I. O. U.," and, lighting a twelve-to-the-pound candle, sulked off to undress and crawl into the little impossibility of a bed.

Night, however, brought no relief to our distinguished friend; for, little though the bed was, it was large enough to admit lodgers, and poor Sponge was nearly worried by the half-famished vermin, who seemed bent on making up for the long fast they had endured since the sixteen-hands-man left. Worst of all, as day dawned, the eternal "Jim Crow" recommenced his saltations, varied only with the

"Come, arouse ye, arouse ye, my merry Swiss boy"

of "me Oncle Gilroy."

"Well, dash my buttons!" groaned Sponge, as the discordant noise shot through his aching head, "but this is the worst spec I ever made in my life. Fed on pork, fluted deaf, bit with bugs, and robbed at cards—fairly, downrightly robbed. Never was a more reg'ler plant put on a man. Thank goodness, however, I haven't paid him—never will, either. Such a confounded, disreputable scoundrel deserves to be punished—big, bad, blackguard-looking fellow! How the deuce I could ever be taken in by such a fellow! Believe he's nothing but a great poaching blackleg. Hasn't the faintest outlines of a gentleman about him—not the slightest particle—not the remotest glimmerin'."

These and similar reflections were interrupted by a great thump against the thin lath-and-plaster wall that separated their rooms, or rather closets, accompanied by an exclamation of—

"HALLOO, OLD BOY! HOW GOES IT?"—an inquiry to which our friend deigned no answer.

"Ord rot ye! you're awake," muttered Facey to himself, well knowing that no one could sleep after such a "Jim-Crow-ing" and "Swiss-boy-ing" as he had given him. He, therefore, resumed his battery, thumping as though he would knock the partition in.

"HALLOO!" at last exclaimed Mr. Sponge, "who's there?"

"Well, old Sivin-Pund-Ten, how goes it?" asked Facey, in a tone of the keenest irony.

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"You be ——!" growled Mr. Sponge, in disgust.

"Breakfast in half-an-hour!" resumed Facey. "Pigs'-puddin's and sarsingers—all 'ot—pipin' 'ot!" continued our host.

"Wish you were pipin' 'ot," growled Mr. Sponge, as he jerked himself out of his little berth.

Though Facey pumped him pretty hard during this second pig repast, he could make nothing out of Sponge with regard to his movements—our friend parrying all his inquiries with his "Mogg," and assurances that he could amuse himself. In vain Facey represented that his Uncle Gilroy would be expecting them; that Mr. Hobler was ready for him to ride over on: Sponge wasn't inclined to shoot, but begged Facey wouldn't stay at home on his account. The fact was, Sponge meditated a bolt, and was in close confab with Leather, in the Rose and Crown stables, arranging matters, when the sound of his name in the yard caused him to look out, when—oh, welcome sight!—a Puddingpote Bower messenger put Sir Harry's note in his hand, which had at length arrived at Jog's through their very miscellaneous transit, called a post. Sponge, in the joy of his heart, actually gave the lad a shilling! He now felt like a new man. He didn't care a rap for Facey, and, ordering Leather to give him the hack and follow with the hunters, he presently cantered out of town as sprucely as if all was on the square.

When, however, Facey found how matters stood, he determined to stop Sponge's things, which Leather resisted; and Facey showing fight, Leather butted him with his head, sending him backwards down stairs and putting his shoulder out. Leather then marched off with the kit, amid the honours of war.

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CHAPTER LXII.

NONSUCH HOUSE AGAIN.



“Baccy” and Billiards.

THE gallant inmates of Nonsuch House had resolved themselves into a committee of speculation, as to whether Mr. Sponge was coming or not ; indeed, they had been betting upon it, the odds at first being a hundred to one that he came, though they had fallen a point or two on the arrival of the post without an answer.

“ Well, I say Mr. What-dy’e-call-him—Sponge—doesn’t come ! ” exclaimed Captain Seedybuck, as he lay full length, with his shaggy greasy head on the fine rose-coloured satin sofa, and

his legs cocked over the cushion.

“ Why not ? ” asked Miss Glitters, who was beguiling the twilight half-hour before candles with knitting.

“ Don’t know,” replied Seedybuck, twirling his moustache, “ don’t know—have a *presentiment* he won’t.”

“ *Sure to come !* ” exclaimed Captain Bouncey, knocking the ashes off his cigar on to the fine Tournay carpet, “ I’ll lay ten to one—ten fifties to one—he does,—a thousand to ten if you like.” If all the purses in the house had been clubbed together, we don’t believe they would have raised fifty pounds.

“ What sort of a looking man is he ? ” asked Miss Glitters, now counting her loops.

“ Oh—whoy—ha—hem—haw—he’s just an ordinary sort of

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lookin' man—nothin' 'tickler any way," drawled Captain Seedeeybuck, now wetting and twirling his moustache.

"Two legs, a head, a back, and so on, I presume," observed the lady.

"Just so," assented Captain Seedeeybuck.

"He's a horsey lookin' sort of man, I should say," observed Captain Bouncey, "walks as if he ought to be ridin'—wears vinegar tops."

"Hate vinegar tops," growled Seedeeybuck.

Just then, in came Lady Scattercash, attended by Mr. Orlando Bugles, the ladies' attractions having caused that distinguished performer to forfeit his engagement at the Surrey Theatre. Captain Cutitfat, Bob Spangles, and Sir Harry quickly followed, and the Sponge question was presently renewed.

"Who says old brown boots comes?" exclaimed Seedeeybuck from the sofa.

"Who's that with his nasty nob on my fine satin sofa?" asked the lady.

"Bob Spangles," replied Seedeeybuck.

"Nothing of the sort," rejoined the lady; "and I'll trouble you to get off."

"Can't—I've got a bone in my leg," rejoined the captain.

"I'll soon make you," replied her ladyship, seizing the squab, and pulling it on to the floor.

As the captain was scrambling up, in came Peter—one of the wageless footmen—with candles, which having distributed equitably about the room, he approached Lady Scattercash, and asked, in an independent sort of way, what room Mr. Soapsuds was to have?

"Soapsuds!—Soapsuds!—that's not his name," exclaimed her ladyship.

"*Sponge*, you fool! Soapey Sponge," exclaimed Cutitfat, who had ferreted out Sponge's *nomme de Londres*.

"He's not come, has he?" asked Miss Glitters, eagerly.

"Yes, my lady—that's to say, miss," replied Peter.

"Come, has he!" chorused three or four voices.

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"Well, he must have a (hiccup) room," observed Sir Harry. "The green—the one above the billiard-room will do," added he.

"But *I* have that, Sir Harry," exclaimed Miss Howard.

"Oh, it'll hold two well enough," observed Miss Glitters.

"Then *you* can be the second," replied Miss Howard, with a toss of her head.

"Indeed!" sneered Miss Glitters, bridling up. "I like that."

"Well, but where's the (hiccup) man to be put?" asked Sir Harry.

"There's Ladofwax's room," suggested her ladyship.

"The captin's locked the door and taken the key with him," replied the footman; "he said he'd be back in a day or two."

"Back in a (hiccup) or two!" observed Sir Harry. "Where is he gone?"

The man smiled.

"*Borrowed*," observed Captain Quod, with an emphasis.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Sir Harry; adding "well, I thought that was Nabbum's gig with the old grey."

"He'll not be back in a hurry," observed Bouncey. "He'll be like the Boulogne gents, who are always going to England but never go."

"Poor Wax!" observed Quod; "he's a big fool, to give him his due."

"If you give him his due it's more than he gives other people, it seems," observed Miss Howard.

"Oh, fie, Miss H.!" exclaimed Captain Seedybuck.

"Well, but the (hiccup) man must have a (hiccup) bed somewhere," observed Sir Harry; adding to the footman, "you'd better (hiccup) the door open, you know."

"Perhaps you'd better try what one of yours will do," observed Bob Spangles, to the convulsion of the company.

In the midst of their mirth Mr. Bottleends was seen piloting Mr. Sponge up to her ladyship.

"Mr. Sponge, my lady," said he, in as low and deferential a tone as if he got his wages punctually every quarter-day.



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"How do you do, Mr. Sponge?" said her ladyship, tendering him her hand with an elegant curtsy.

"How are you, Mr. (hiccup) Sponge?" asked Sir Harry, offering his; "I believe you know the (hiccup) company?" continued he, waving his hand around; "Miss (hiccup) Glitters, Captain (hiccup) Quod, Captain Bouncey, Mr. (hiccup) Bugles, Captain (hiccup) Seedeybuck, and so on;" whereupon Miss Glitters curtsied, the gentlemen bobbed their heads and drew near our hero, who had now stationed himself before the fire.

"Coldish, to-night," said he, stooping and placing both hands to the bars. "Coldish," repeated he, rubbing his hands and looking around.

"It generally is about this time of the year, I think," observed Miss Glitters, who was quite ready to enter for our friend.

"Hope it won't stop hunting," said Mr. Sponge.

"Hope not," replied Sir Harry; "would be a bore if it did."

"I wonder you gentlemen don't prefer hunting in a frost," observed Miss Howard; "one would think it would be just the time you'd want a good warming."

"I don't agree with you, there," replied Mr. Sponge, looking at her, and thinking she was not nearly so pretty as Miss Glitters.

"Do you hunt to-morrow?" asked he of Sir Harry, not having been able to obtain any information at the stables.

"(Hiccup) to-morrow? Oh, I daresay we shall," replied Sir Harry, who kept his hounds as he did his carriages, to be used when wanted. "Daresay we shall," repeated he.

But though Sir Harry spoke thus encouragingly of their prospects, he took no steps, as far as Mr. Sponge could learn, to carry out the design. Indeed, the subject of hunting was never once mentioned, the conversation after dinner, instead of being about the Quorn, or the Pytchley, or Jack Thompson with the Atherstone, turning upon the elegance and lighting of the Casinos in the Adelaide Gallery and Windmill Street, and the relative merits of those establishments over the Casino de Venise in High Holborn. Nor did morning produce any

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change for the better, for Sir Harry and all the captains came down in their usual flashy broken-down player-looking attire, their whole thoughts being absorbed in arranging for a pool at billiards, in which the ladies took part. So with billiards, brandy, and “ ‘baccy,”—“ ‘baccy,” brandy, and billiards, varied with an occasional stroll about the grounds, the non-sporting inmates of Nonsuch House beguiled the time, much to Mr. Sponge's disgust, whose soul was on fire and eager for the fray. The reader's perhaps being the same, we will skip Christmas and pass on to New Year's Day.

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CHAPTER LXIII.

A FAMILY BREAKFAST.



WERE almost superfluous to say that NEW-YEAR'S DAY is always a great holiday. It is a day on which custom commands people to be happy and idle, whether they have the means of being happy and idle or not. It is a day for which happiness and idleness are "booked," and parties are planned and arranged long beforehand. Some go to the town, some to the country; some take rail; some take steam; some take greyhounds; some take gigs; while others take guns and pop at all the little dickey-birds that come in their way. The rural population generally incline to a hunt. They are not very particular as to style, so long as there are a certain number of hounds, and some men in scarlet, to blow their horns, halloo, and crack their whips.

The population, especially the rising population about Nonsuch House, all inclined that way. A New-Year's Day hunt with Sir Harry had long been looked forward to by the little Raws, and the little Spoonneys, and the big and little Cheeks, and we don't know how many others. Nay, it had been talked of by the elder boys at their respective schools—we beg pardon, academies—Doctor Switchington's, Mr. Latheringington's, Mrs. Skelper's, and a liberal allowance of boasting indulged in, as to how they would show each other the way over the hedges and ditches. The thing had long been talked of. Old Johnny Raw had asked Sir Harry to arrange the day so long ago that Sir Harry had forgotten all about it. Sir Harry was one of those good-natured souls who can't say

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"No" to any one. If anybody had asked if they might set fire to his house, he would have said,

"Oh, (hiccup) certainly, my dear (hiccup) fellow, if it will give you any (hiccup) pleasure."

Now, for the hiccup day.

It is generally a frost on New Year's Day ;—however wet and sloppy the weather may be up to the end of the year, it generally turns over a new leaf on that day. New Year's Day is generally a bright, bitter, sunshiny day, with starry ice, and a most decided anti-hunting feeling about it—light, airy, ringy, anything but cheery for hunting.

Thus it was in Sir Harry Scattercash's county. Having smoked and drank the old year out, the captains and company retired to their couches without thinking about hunting. Mr. Sponge, indeed, was about tired of asking when the hounds would be going out. It was otherwise, however, with the rising generation, who were up betimes, and began pouring in upon Nonsuch House in every species of garb, on every description of steed, by every line and avenue of approach.

"Halloo ! what's up now ?" exclaimed Lady Scattercash, as she caught view of the first batch rounding the corner to the front of the house.

"Who have we here?" asked Miss Glitters, as a ponderous, party-coloured clown, on a great, curly-coated cart-horse, brought up the rear.

"Early callers," observed Captain Seedyebuck, eating away complacently.

"Friends of Mr. Sponge's, most likely," suggested Captain Quod.

"Some of the little Sponges come to see their pa, p'raps," lisped Miss Howard, pretending to be shocked after she had said it.

"Bravo, Miss Howard!" exclaimed Captain Cutitfat, clapping his hands.

"I said nothing, captain," observed the young lady with becoming prudery.

"Here we are again!" exclaimed Captain Quod, as a troop

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of various sized urchins, in pea-jackets, with blue noses and red comforters, on very shaggy ponies, the two youngest swinging in panniers over an ass, drew up alongside of the first comers.

"Whose sliding-scale of innocence is that, I wonder!" exclaimed Miss Howard, contemplating the variously sized chubby faces through the window.

"*He, he, he! ho, ho, ho!*" giggled the guests.

Another batch of innocence now hove in sight.

"Oh, those are the little (hiccup) Raws," observed Sir Harry, catching sight of the sky-blue collar of the servant's long drab coat. "Good chap, old Johnny Raw; ask them to (hiccup) in," continued he, "and give them some (hiccup) cherry brandy;" and thereupon Sir Harry began nodding and smiling, and making signs to them to come in. The youngsters, however, maintained their position.

"The little stupexes!" exclaimed Miss Howard, going to the window, and throwing up the sash. "Come in, young gents!" cried she, in a commanding tone, addressing herself to the last comers. "Come in, and have some toffy and lollypops! D'ye hear?" continued she, in a still louder voice, and motioning her head towards the door.

The boys sat mute.

"You little stupid monkeys," muttered she in an undertone, as the cold air struck upon her head. "Come in, like good boys," added she, in a louder key, pointing with her finger towards the door.

"Nor, thank ye!" at last drawled the elder of the boys.

"Nor, thank ye!" repeated Miss Howard, imitating the drawl. "Why not?" asked she, sharply.

The boy stared stupidly.

"Why won't you come in?" asked she, again addressing him.

"Don't know," replied the boy, staring vacantly at his younger brother, as he rubbed a pearl off his nose on the back of his hand.

"Don't know!" ejaculated Miss Howard, stamping her little foot on the Turkey carpet.

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"Mar said we hadn't," whined the younger boy, coming to the rescue of his brother.

"Mar said we hadn't!" retorted the fair interrogator. "Why not?"

"Don't know," replied the elder.

"Don't know! you little stupid animal," snapped Miss Howard, the cold air increasing the warmth of her temper. "I wonder what you *do* know. Why did your ma say you were not to come in?" continued she, addressing the younger one.

"Because—because," hesitated he, "she said the house was full of trumpets."

"Trumpets, you little scamp!" exclaimed the lady, reddening up; "I'll get a whip and cut your jacket into ribbons on your back." And thereupon she banged down the window and closed the conversation.

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CHAPTER LXIV.

THE RISING GENERATION



HE lull that prevailed in the breakfast-room on Miss Howard's return from the window was speedily interrupted by fresh arrivals before the door. The three Master Baskets in coats and lay-over collars, Master Shutter in a jacket and trousers, the two Master Bulgeys in woollen overalls with very large hunting whips, Master Brick in a velveteen shooting-jacket, and the two Cheeks with their tweed trousers thrust into fiddle-case boots, on all sorts of ponies and family horses, began pawing and disordering the gravel in front of Nonsuch House.

George Cheek was the head boy at Mr. Latherington's classical and commercial academy, at Flagellation Hall (late the Crown and Sceptre Hotel and Posting House, on the Bankstone Road), where, for forty pounds a year, eighty young gentlemen were fitted for the pulpit, the senate, the bar, the counting-house, or anything else their fond parents fancied them fit for.

George was a tall stripling, out at elbows, in at the knees, with his red knuckled hands thrust a long way through his tight coat. He was just of that awkward age when boys fancy themselves men, and men are not prepared to lower themselves to their level. Ladies get on better with them than men: either the ladies are more tolerant of twaddle, or their discerning eyes see in the gawky youth the germ of future usefulness. George was on capital terms with himself. He was the oracle of Mr. Latherington's school, where he was not

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only head boy and head swell, but a considerable authority on sporting matters. He took in *Bell's Life*, which he read from beginning to end, and "noted its contents," as they say in the city.

"I'll tell you what all these little (hiccup) animals will be wanting," observed Sir Harry, as he cayenne-peppered a turkey's leg; "they'll be come for a (hiccup) hunt."

"Wish they may get it," observed Captain Seedeystick; adding, "why, the ground's as hard as iron."

"There's a big boy," observed Miss Howard, eyeing George Cheek through the window.

"Let's have him in, and see what he's got to say for himself," said Miss Glitters.

"*You* ask him, then," rejoined Miss Howard, who didn't care to risk another rub.

"Peter," said Lady Scattercash to the footman, who had been loitering about, listening to the conversation,—"*Peter*, go and ask that tall boy with the blue neckerchief and the riband round his hat to come in."

"Yes, my lady," replied Peter.

"And the (hiccup) Spoonneys, and the (hiccup) Bulgeys, and the (hiccup) Raws, and all the little (hiccup) rascals," added Sir Harry.

"The Raws won't come, Sir H.," observed Miss Howard, soberly.

"Bigger fools they," replied Sir Harry.

Presently Peter returned with a tail, headed by George Cheek, who came striding and slouching up the room, and stuck himself down on Lady Scattercash's right. The small boys squeezed themselves in as they could, one by Captain Seedeystick, another by Captain Bouncey, one by Miss Glitters, a fourth by Miss Howard, and so on. They all fell ravenously upon the provisions.

Gobble, gobble, gobble, was the order of the day.

"Well, and how often have you been flogged this half?" asked Lady Scattercash of George Cheek, as she gave him a cup of coffee.

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Her ladyship hadn't much liking for youths of his age, and would just as soon vex them as not.

"Well, and how often have you been flogged this half?" asked she again, not getting an answer to her first inquiry.

"Not at all," growled Cheek, reddening up.

"Oh, flogged!" exclaimed Miss Glitters. "You wouldn't have a young man like him flogged; it's only the little boys that get that—is it, Mister Cheek?"

"To be sure not," assented the youth.

"Mister Cheek's a man," observed Miss Glitters, eyeing him archly as he sat stuffing his mouth with currant-loaf plentifully besmeared with raspberry-jam. "He'll be wanting a wife soon," added she, smiling across the table at Captain Seedeybuck.

"I question but he's got one," observed the captain.

"No, ar haven't," replied Cheek, pleased at the imputation.

"Then there's a chance for you, Miss G.," retorted the captain. "Mrs. George Cheek will look well on a glazed card with gilt edges."

"What a cub!" exclaimed Miss Howard, in disgust.

"You're another," replied Master Cheek, amidst a roar of laughter from the party.

"Well, but you ask your master if you mayn't have a wife next half, and we'll see if we can't arrange matters," observed Miss Glitters.

"Noo, ar sharnt," replied George, stuffing his mouth full of preserved apricot.

"Why not?" asked Miss Howard.

"Because—because—ar'll have somethin' younger," replied George.

"Bravo, young Chesterfield!" exclaimed Miss Howard; adding, "See what it is to be thick with Lord John Manners!"

"Ar'm *not*," growled the boy, amidst the mirth of the company.

"Well, but what must we do with these little (hiccup)?" asked Sir Harry, at last rising from the breakfast-table, and looking listlessly round the company for an answer.

"O! liquor them well, and send them home to their



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mammas," suggested Captain Bouncey, who was all for the drink.

"But they won't take their (hiccup)," replied Sir Harry, holding up a Curaçoa bottle, to show how little had disappeared.

"Try them with cherry brandy," suggested Captain Seedey-buck, adding "it's sweeter. Now, young man," continued he, addressing George Cheek, as he poured him out a wine-glassful, "this is the real Daffy's elixir that you read of in the papers. It's the finest compound that ever was known. It will make your hair curl, your whiskers grow, and you a man before your mother."

"No-a, n-o-ar, don't want any more," growled the young gentleman, turning away in disgust. "Ar won't drink any more."

"Well, but be sociable," observed Miss Howard, helping herself to a glass.

"No-o-a, no, ar don't want to be sociable," growled he, diving into his trouser-pockets, and wriggling about on his chair.

"Well, then, what *will* you do?" asked Miss Howard.

"Hunt," replied the youth.

"*Hunt!*" exclaimed Bob Spangles; "why, the ground's as hard as bricks."

"N-o-a, it's not," replied the youth.

"What a whelp!" exclaimed Miss Howard, rising from the table in disgust.

"My uncle, Jellyboy, wouldn't let such a frost stop him, I know," observed the boy.

"Who's your uncle Jellyboy?" asked Miss Glitters.

"He's a farmer, and keeps a few harriers at Scutley," observed Bob Spangles, *sotto voce*.

"And is that your extraordinary horse with all the legs?" asked Miss Howard, putting her glass to her eye, and scrutinising a lank, woolly-coated weed, getting led about by a blue-aproned gardener. "Is that your extraordinary horse, with all the legs?" repeated she, following the animal about with her glass.

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"Hoots, it hasn't more legs than other people's," growled George.

"It's got ten, at all events," replied Miss Howard, to the astonishment of the juveniles.

"Nor, it hasn't," replied George.

"Yes, it has," rejoined the lady.

"Nor, it hasn't," repeated George.

"Come and see," said the lady; adding, "perhaps it's put out some since you got off."

George slouched up to where she stood at the window.

"Now," said he, as the gardener turned the horse round, and he saw it had but four, "how many has it?"

"Ten!" replied Miss Howard.

"Hoots," replied George, "you think it's April Fool's Day, I dare say."

"No, I don't" replied Miss Howard; "but I maintain your horse has ten legs. See, now!" continued she, "what do you call these coming here?"

"His two forelegs," replied George.

"Well, two fours—twice four's eight, eh? and his two hind ones make ten."

"Hoots," growled George, amidst the mirth of his comrades, "you're makin' a fool o' one."

"Well, but what must I do with all these little (hiccup) creatures?" asked Sir Harry again, seeing the plot still thickening outside.

"Turn them out a bagman," suggested Mr. Sponge, in an undertone; adding, "Watchorn has a three-legged 'un, I know, in the hay-loft."

"Oh, Watchorn wouldn't (hiccup) on such a day as this," replied Sir Harry. "New-Year's Day, too—most likely away, seeing his young hounds at walk."

"We might see, at all events," observed Mr. Sponge.

"Well," assented Sir Harry, ringing the bell. "Peter," said he, as the servant answered the summons, "I wish you would (hiccup) to Mr. Watchorn's, and ask if he'll have the kindness to (hiccup) down here." Sir Harry was obliged to

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be polite, for Watchorn, too, was on the "free list," as Miss Glitters called it.

"Yes, Sir Harry," replied Peter, leaving the room.

Presently Peter's white legs were seen wending their way among the laurels and evergreens, in the direction of Mr. Watchorn's house; he having a house and grass for six cows, all of whose milk, he declared, went to the puppies and young hounds. Luckily, or unluckily, perhaps, Mr. Watchorn was at home, and was in the act of shaving as Peter entered. He was a square-built, dark-faced, dark-haired, good-looking, ill-looking fellow, who cultivated his face on the four-course system of husbandry. First, he had a bare fallow—we mean a clean shave; that of course was followed by a full crop of hair all over, except on his upper lip; then he had a soldier's shave, off by the ear; which in turn was followed by a Newgate frill. The latter was his present style. He had now no whiskers, but an immense protuberance of bristly black hair, rising like a wave above his kerchief. Though he cared no more about hunting than his master, he was very fond of his red coat, which he wore on all occasions, substituting a hat for a cap when "off-duty," as he called it. Having attired himself in his best scarlet, of which he claimed three a year,—one for wet days, one for dry days, another for high days—very natty kerseymere shorts and gaiters, with a small-striped, standing-collar, toilenette waistcoat, he proceeded to obey the summons.

"Watchorn," said Sir Harry, as the important gentleman appeared at the breakfast-room door,—“Watchorn, these young (hiccup) gentlemen want a (hiccup) hunt.”

"O! want must be their master, Sir 'Arry," replied Watchorn, with a broad grin on his flushed face, for he had been drinking all night, and was half drunk then.

"Can't you manage it?" asked Sir Harry, mildly.

"'Ow is't possible, Sir 'Arry," asked the huntsman, "'ow is't possible? No man's fonder of 'untin' than I am, but to turn out on sich a day as this would be a daring—a desperate violation of all the laws of registered propriety. The Pope's bull would be nothin' to it!"

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"How so?" asked Sir Harry, puzzled with the jumble.

"How so?" repeated Watchorn; "how so? Why, in the fust place, it's a mortal 'ard frost, 'arder nor hiron; in the second place, I've got no arrangements made,—you can't turn out a pack of 'igh-bred fox-'ounds as you would a lot of 'staggers' or 'muggers;' and, in the third place, you'll knock all your nags to bits, and they are a deal better in their wind than they are on their legs, as it is. No, Sir 'Arry—no," continued he, slowly and thoughtfully. "No, Sir 'Arry, no. Be Cardinal Wiseman, for once, Sir 'Arry; be Cardinal Wiseman for once, and don't *think* of it."

"Well," replied Sir Harry, looking at George Cheek, "I suppose there's no help for it."

"It was quite a thaw where I came from," observed Cheek, half to Sir Harry and half to the huntsman.

"'Deed, sir, 'deed," replied Mr. Watchorn, with a chuck of his fringed chin, "it generally is a thaw everywhere but where hounds meet."

"My Uncle Jellyboy wouldn't be stopped by such a frost as this," observed Cheek.

"'Deed, sir, 'deed," replied Watchorn, "your Uncle Jellyboy's a very fine feller, I dare say,—very fine feller; no such conjurers in these parts as he is. What man dare, I dare; he who dares more, is no man," added Watchorn, giving his fat thigh a hearty slap.

"Well done, old Talliho!" exclaimed Miss Glitters. "We'll have you on the stage next."

"What will you wet your whistle with after your fine speech?" asked Lady Scattercash.

"Take a tumbler of chumpine, if there is any," replied Watchorn, looking about for a long-necked bottle.

"Fear you'll come on badly," observed Captain Seedeybuck, holding up an empty one, "for Bouncey and I have just finished the last;" the captain chucking the bottle sideways on to the floor, and rolling it towards its companions in the corner.

"Have a fresh bottle," suggested Lady Scattercash, drawing the bell-string at her chair.

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"Champagne," said her ladyship, as the footman answered the summons.

"*Two* on em!" exclaimed Captain Bouncey.

"*Three*!" shouted Sir Harry.

"We'll have a regular set-to," observed Miss Howard, who was fond of champagne.

"New-Year's Day," replied Bouncey, "and ought to be properly observed."

Presently, Fiz—z,—pop,—bang! Fiz—z,—pop,—bang! went the bottles; and, as the hissing beverage foamed over the bottle-necks, glasses were sought and held out to catch the creaming contents.

"Here's a (hiccup) happy new year to us all!" exclaimed Sir Harry, drinking off his wine.

"H-o-o-ray!" exclaimed the company in irregular order, as they drank off theirs.

"We'll drink Mr. Watchorn and the Nonsuch hounds!" exclaimed Bob Spangles, as Watchorn, having drained off his tumbler, replaced it on the sideboard.

"With all the honours!" exclaimed Captain Cutitfat, filling his glass and rising to give the time; "Watchorn, your good health!" "Watchorn, your good health!" "Watchorn, your good health!" sounded from all parts, which Watchorn kept acknowledging, and looking about for the means to return the compliment, his friends being more intent upon drinking his health than upon supplying him with wine. At last he caught the third of a bottle of "chumpine," and emptying it into his tumbler, held it up while he thus addressed them.

"Gen'lemen all!" said he, "I thank you most 'ticklarly for this mark of your 'tention (applause); it's most gratifyin' to my feelin's to be thus remembered (applause). I could say a great deal more, but the liquor won't wait." So saying, he drained off his glass while the wine effervesced.

"Well, and what d'ye (hiccup) of the weather now?" asked Sir Harry, as his huntsman again deposited his tumbler on the sideboard.

"'Pon my soul! Sir 'Arry," replied Watchorn, quite briskly,

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"I really think we *might* 'unt—we might try, at all events. The day seems changed, some'ow," added he, staring vacantly out of the window on the bright sunny landscape, with the leafless trees dancing before his eyes.

"I think so," said Sir Harry. "What do you think, Mr. Sponge?" added he, appealing to our hero.

"Half an hour may make a great difference," observed Mr. Sponge. "The sun will then be at its best."

"We'll try, at all events," observed Sir Harry.

"That's right," exclaimed George Cheek, waving a scarlet bandana over his head.

"I shall expect you to ride up to the 'ounds, young gent," observed Watchorn, darting an angry look at the speaker.

"Won't I, old boy!" exclaimed George; "ride over you, if you don't get out of the way."

"'Deed," sneered the huntsman, whisking about to leave the room; muttering, as he passed behind the large Indian screen at the door, something about "jawing jackanapes, well called Cheek."

"'Unt in 'alf an hour!" exclaimed Watchorn, from the steps of the front door; an announcement that was received by the little Raws, and little Spoonies, and little Baskets, and little Bulgeys, and little Bricks, and little others, with rapturous applause.

All was now commotion and hurry-scurry inside and out; glasses were drained, lips wiped, and napkins thrown hastily away, while ladies and gentlemen began grouping and talking about hats and habits, and what they should ride.

"You go with me, Orlando," said Lady Scattercash to our friend Bugles, recollecting the quantity of diachylon plaster it had taken to repair the damage of his former equestrian performance. "You go with me, Orlando," said she, "in the phaeton; and I'll lend Lucy," nodding towards Miss Glitters, "my habit and horse."

"Who can lend me a coat?" asked Captain Seedeybuck, examining the skirts of a much frayed invisible-green surtout.

"A coat!" replied Captain Quod; "I can lend you a

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Joinville, if that will do as well," the captain feeling his own extensive one as he spoke.

"Hardly," said Seedeystick, turning about to ask Sir Harry.

"What!—you are going to give Watchorn a tussle, are you?" asked Captain Cutitfat of George Cheek, as the latter began adjusting the fox-toothed riband about his hat.

"I believe you," replied George, with a knowing jerk of his head; adding, "it won't take much to beat him."

"What! he's a slow 'un, is he?" asked Cutitfat, in an undertone.

"Slowest coach I ever saw," growled George.

"Won't ride, won't he?" asked the captain.

"Not if he can help it," replied George; adding, "but he's such a shocking huntsman—never saw such a huntsman in all my life."

George's experience lay between his uncle Jellyboy, who rode eighteen stone and a half, Tom Scramble, the pedestrian huntsman of the Slowfoot hounds, near Mr. Latheringington's, and Mr. Watchorn. But critics, especially hunting ones, are all ready made, as Lord Byron said.

"Well, we'd better disperse and get ready," observed Bob Spangles, making for the door; whereupon the tide of population flowed that way, and the room was presently cleared.

George Cheek and the juveniles then returned to their friends in the front; and George got up pony races among the Johnny Raws, the Baskets, the Bulgeys, and the Spoonneys, thrice round the carriage-ring and a distance, to the detriment of the gravel and the discomfiture of the flower-bed in the centre.

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CHAPTER LXV.

THE KENNEL AND THE STUD.



E will now accompany Mr. Watchorn to the stable, whither his resolute legs carried him as soon as the champagne wrought the wonderful change in his opinion of the weather, though, as he every now and then crossed a spangled piece of ground upon which the sun had not struck, or stopped to crack a piece of ice with his toe, he shook his heated head, and doubted whether *he* was Cardinal Wiseman for making the attempt. Nothing but the fact of his considering it perfectly immaterial whether he was with his hounds or not encouraged him in the undertaking. "Dash them!" said he, "they must just take care of themselves." With which laudable resolution, and an inward anathema at George Cheek, he left off trying the ground and tapping the ice.

Watchorn's hurried, excited appearance produced little satisfaction among the grooms and helpers at the stables, who were congratulating themselves on the opportune arrival of the frost, and arranging how they should spend their New-Year's Day.

"Look sharp, lads! look sharp!" exclaimed he, clapping his hands as he ran up the yard. "Look sharp, lads! look sharp!" repeated he, as the astonished helpers showed their bare arms and dirty shirts at the partially opened doors, responsive to the sound. "Send Snaffle here, send Brown here, send Green here, send Snooks here," exclaimed he, with the air of a man in authority.

Now Snaffle was the stud-groom, a personage altogether

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independent of the huntsman, and, in the ordinary course of nature, Snaffle had just as much right to send for Watchorn as Watchorn had to send for him ; but Watchorn being, as we said before, some way connected with Lady Scattercash, he just did as he liked among the whole of them, and they were too good judges to rebel.

"Snaffle," said he, as the portly, well-put-on personage waddled up to him ; "Snaffle," said he, "how many sound osses have you ?"

"None, sir," replied Snaffle, confidently.

"How many three-legged 'uns have you that can go, then ?"

"O ! a good many," replied Snaffle, raising his hands to tell them off on his fingers. "There's Hop-the-twig, and Hannah Bell (Hannibal), and Ugly Jade, and Sir-danapolis—the Baronet as we calls him—and Harkaway, and Hit-me-hard, and Single-peeper, and Jack's-alive, and Groggytoes, and Greedyboy, and Puff-and-blow ; that's to say *two* and three-legged 'uns, at least," observed Snaffle, qualifying his original assertion.

"Ah, well !" said Watchorn, "that'll do—two legs are too many for some of the rips they'll have to carry——. Let me see," continued he, thoughtfully, "I'll ride 'Arkaway."

"Yes, sir," said Snaffle.

"Sir 'Arry, 'It-me-'ard."

"Won't you put him on Sir-danapolis ?" asked Snaffle.

"No," replied Watchorn, "no ; I wants to save the Bart.—I wants to save the Bart. Sir 'Arry must ride 'It-me-'ard."

"Is her ladyship going ?" asked Snaffle.

"Her ladyship drives," replied Watchorn ; "and you, Snooks," addressing a bare-armed helper, "tell Mr. Traces to turn her out a pony phaeton and pair, with fresh rosettes and all complete, you know."

"Yes, sir," said Snooks, with a touch of his forelock.

"And you'd better tell Mr. Leather to have a horse for his master," observed Watchorn to Snaffle, "unless as how you wish to put him on one of yours."

"Not I," exclaimed Snaffle ; "have enough to mount without him. D'ye know how many 'll be goin' ?" asked he.

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"No," replied Watchorn, hurrying off; adding, as he went, "oh, hang 'em, just saddle 'em all, and let 'em scramble for 'em."

The scene then changed. Instead of hissing helpers pursuing their vocations in stable or saddle-room, they began bustling about with saddles on their heads and bridles in their hands, the day of expected ease being changed into one of unusual trouble. Mr. Leather declared, as he swept the clothes over Multum-in-Parvo's tail, that it was the most unconscionable proceeding he had ever witnessed; and muttered something about the quiet comforts he had left at Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey's, hinting his regret at having come to Sir Harry's, in a sort of dialogue with himself as he saddled the horse. The beauties of the last place always come out strong when a servant gets to another. But we must accompany Mr. Watchorn.

Though his early career with the Camberwell and Balham Hill Union harriers had not initiated him much into the delicacies of the chase, yet, recollecting the presence of Mr. Sponge, he felt suddenly seized with a desire of "doing things as they should be;" and he went muttering to the kennel, thinking how he would leave Dinnerbell and Prosperous at home, and how the pack would look quite as well without Frantic running half a field ahead, or old Stormer and Stunner bringing up the rear with long protracted howls. He doubted, indeed, whether he would take Desperate, who was an incorrigible skirter; but as she was not much worse in this respect than Chatterer or Harmony, who was also an inveterate babbler, and the pack would look rather short without them, he reserved the point for further consideration, as the judges say.

His speculations were interrupted by arriving at the kennel; and, finding the door fast, he looked under the slate, and above the frame, and inside the window, and on the wall, for the key; and his shake, and kick, and clatter, were only answered by a full chorus from the excited company within.

"Hang the feller! what's got 'im!" exclaimed he, meaning Joe Haggish, the feeder, whom he expected to find there.

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Joe, however, was absent; not holiday-making, but on a diplomatic visit to Mr. Greystones, the miller, at Splashford, who had positively refused to supply any more meal, until his "little bill" (430*l.*) for the three previous years was settled; and flesh being very scarce in the country, the hounds were quite light and fit to go. Joe had gone to try and coax Greystones out of a ton or two of meal, on the strength of its being New Year's Day.

"Dash the feller! wot's got 'im?" exclaimed Watchorn, seizing the latch, and rattling it furiously. The melody of the hungry pack increased. "'Ord rot the door!" exclaimed the infuriated huntsman, setting his back against it, when at the first push, open it flew. Watchorn fell back, and the astonished pack poured over his prostrate body, regardless alike of his holiday coat, his tidy tie, and toilenette vest. What a scrimmage! what a kick-up was there! Away the hounds scampered, towling and howling, some up to the flesh-wheel, to see if there was any meat; some to the bone-heap, to see if there was any there; others down to the dairy, to try and effect an entrance in it; while Launcher, and Lightsome, and Burster, rushed to the backyard of Nonsuch House, and were presently over ears in the pig-pail.

"Get me my horn!—get me my whop!—get me my cap!—get me my bouts!" exclaimed Watchorn, as he recovered his legs, and saw his wife eyeing the scene from the door. "Get me my bouts!—get me my cap!—get me my whop!—get me my horn, *woman!*" continued he, reversing the order of things, and rubbing the hounds' feet-marks off his clothes as he spoke.

Mrs. Watchorn was too well drilled to dwell upon orders, and she met her lord and master in the passage with the enumerated articles in her hand. Watchorn having deposited himself on an entrance-hall chair—for it was a roomy, well-furnished house, having been the steward's while there was anything to take care of—Mrs. Watchorn proceeded to strip off his gaiters while he drew on his boots and crowned himself with his cap. Mrs. Watchorn then buckled on his spurs, and he



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hurried off, horn in hand, desiring her to have him a basin of turtle-soup ready against he came in ; adding, "she knew where to get it." The frosty air then resounded with the twang, twang, twang of his horn, and hounds began drawing up from all quarters, just as sportsmen cast up at a meet from no one knows where.

"*He-here*, hounds—*he-here*, good dogs !" cried he, coaxing and making much of the first comers ; "*he-here*, Galloper, old boy !" continued he, diving into his coat-pocket, and throwing him a bit of biscuit. The appearance of food had a very encouraging effect, for forthwith there was a general rush towards Watchorn, and it was only by rating and swinging his "*whop*" about that he prevented the pack from pawing, and perhaps downing him. At length, having got them somewhat tranquillised, he set off on his return to the stables, coaxing the shy hounds, and rating and rapping those that seemed inclined to break away. Thus he managed to march into the stable-yard in pretty good order, just as the house party arrived in the opposite direction, attired in the most extraordinary and incongruous habiliments. There was Bob Spangles, in a swallow-tailed, mulberry-coloured scarlet, that looked like an old pen-wiper, white duck trousers, and lacklustre Napoleon boots ; Captain Cutitfat, in a smart new "*Moses and Son's*" straight-cut scarlet, with blood-hound heads on the buttons, yellow-ochre leathers, and Wellington boots with drab knee-caps ; little Bouncey in a tremendously baggy long-backed scarlet, whose gaping outside pockets showed that they had carried its late owner's hands as well as his handkerchief ; the clumsy device on the tarnished buttons looking quite as much like sheep's-heads as foxes'. Bouncey's tight tweed trousers were thrust into a pair of wide fisherman's boots, which, but for his little roundabout stomach, would have swallowed him up bodily. Captain Quod appeared in a venerable dress-coat of the Melton Hunt, made in the popular reign of Mr. Errington, whose much-stained and smeared silk facings bore testimony to the good cheer it had seen. As if in contrast to the light

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airiness of this garment, Quod had on a tremendously large shaggy brown waistcoat, with horn buttons, a double tier of pockets, and a nick out in front. With an unfair partiality his nether man was attired in a pair of shabby old black, or rather brown, dress trousers, thrust into long Wellington boots with brass heel spurs. Captain Seedeybuck had on a spruce swallow-tailed green coat of Sir Harry's, a pair of old tweed trousers of his own, thrust into long chamois-leather opera-boots, with red morocco tops, giving the whole a very unique and novel appearance. Mr. Orlando Bugles, though going to drive with my lady, thought it incumbent to put on his jack-boots, and appeared in kerseymere shorts, and a highly frogged and furred blue frock-coat, with the corner of a musked cambric kerchief acting the part of a star on his breast.

"Here comes old sixteen-string'd Jack!" exclaimed Bob Spangles, as his brother-in-law, Sir Harry, came hitching and limping along, all strings, and tapes, and ends, as usual, followed by Mr. Sponge in the strict and severe order of sporting costume; double-stitched, back-stitched, sleeve-strapped, pull-devil, pull-baker coat, broad corduroy vest with fox-teeth buttons, still broader corded breeches, and the redoubtable vinegar tops. "Now we're all ready!" exclaimed Bob, working his arms as if anxious to be off, and giving a shrill shilling-gallery whistle with his fingers, causing the stable-doors to fly open, and the variously tackled steeds to emerge from their stalls.

"A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!" exclaimed Miss Glitters, running up as fast as her long habit, or rather Lady Scattercash's long habit, would allow her. "A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!" repeated she, diving into the throng.

"White Surrey is saddled for the field," replied Mr. Orlando Bugles, drawing himself up pompously, and waving his right hand gracefully towards her ladyship's Arab palfrey, inwardly congratulating himself that Miss Glitters was going to be bumped upon it instead of him.

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"Give us a leg up, Seedeey!" exclaimed Lucy Glitters to the "gent" of the green coat, fearing that Miss Howard, who was a little behind, might claim the horse.

Captain Seedeeybuck seized her pretty little uplifted foot and vaulted her into the saddle as light as a cork. Taking the horse gently by the mouth, she gave him the slightest possible touch with the whip, and moved him about at will, instead of fretting and fighting him as the clumsy, heavy-handed Bugles had done. She looked beautiful on horseback, and for a time riveted the attention of our sportsmen. At length they began to think of themselves, and then there were such climbings on, and clutchings, and catchings, and clingings, and *gently*-ings, and who-ho-ings, and who-ha-ings, and questionings if "such a horse was quiet?" "if another could leap well?" if a third "had a good mouth?" and whether a fourth "ever ran away?"

"Take my port-stirrup up two 'oles!" exclaimed Captain Bouncey from the top of high Hop-the-twigg, sticking out a leg to let the groom do it.

The captain had affected the sea instead of the land-service, while a betting-list keeper, and found the bluff sailor character very taking.

"Avast there!" exclaimed he, as the groom ran the buckle up to the desired hole. "Now," said he, gathering up the reins in a bunch, "how many knots an hour can this 'orse go?"

"Twenty," replied the man, thinking he meant miles.

"Let her go then!" exclaimed the captain, kicking the horse's sides with his spurless heels.

Mr. Watchorn now mounted Harkaway; Sir Harry scrambled on to Hit-me-hard; Miss Howard was hoisted on to Groggytoes, and all the rest being "fit" with horses of some sort or other, and the races in the front being over, the juveniles poured into the yard, Lady Scattercash's pony phaeton turned out, and our friends were at length ready for a start.

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CHAPTER LXVI.

THE HUNT.



WHILE the foregoing arrangements were in progress, Mr. Watchorn had desired Slarkey, the knife-boy, to go into the old hay-loft and take the three-legged fox he would find, and put him down among the laurels by the summer-house, where he would draw up to him all "reg'lar" like. Accordingly, Slarkey went, but the old cripple having mounted the rafters, Slarkey didn't see him, or rather seeing but one fox, he clutched him, with a greater regard to his not biting him than to seeing how many legs he had; consequently he bagged an uncommonly fine old dog fox that Wiley Tom had just stolen from Lord Scamperdale's new cover at Faggotfurze; and it was not until Slarkey put him down among the bushes, and saw how lively he went, that he found his mistake. However, there was no help for it, and he had just time to pocket the bag when Watchorn's half-drunken cheer, and the reverberating cracks of ponderous whips on either side of the Dean, announced the approach of the pack.

"*He-leu in there!*" cried Watchorn to the hounds. "'Ord, dommee, but it's slippy," said he to himself. "Have at him, Plunderer, good dog! *I wish I may be Cardinal Wiseman for comin',*" added he, seeing how his breath showed on the air. "*Ho-o-i-cks!* pash 'im hup! I'll be dashed if I shan't be down!" exclaimed he, as his horse slid a long slide. "*He-leu, in! Conqueror, old boy!*" continued he, exclaiming loud enough for Mr. Sponge who was drawing near to hear, "find

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us a fox that'll give us five and forty minnits!" the speaker inwardly hoping they might chop their bagman in cover. "Yo-o-i-cks! rout him out!" continued he, getting more energetic. "Yo-o-i-cks! wind him! Yo-o-i-cks! stir us hup a teaser!"

"No go, I think," observed George Cheek, ambling up on his leggy weed.

"No go, ye young infidel," growled Watchorn, "who taught you to talk about go's, I wonder; ought to be at school larnin' to cipher, or ridin' the globes," Mr. Watchorn not exactly knowing what the term "use of the globes" meant. "D'ye call that *nothin'*!" exclaimed he, taking off his cap as he viewed the fox stealing along the gravel walk; adding to himself, as he saw his even action, and full, well-tagged brush, "'Ord rot him, he's got hold of the wrong 'un!"

"It was, however, no time for thought. In an instant the welkin rang with the outburst of the pack and the clamour of the field. "*Talli-ho!*" "*Talli-ho!*" "*Talli-ho!*" "*Hoop!*" "*Hoop!*" "*Hoop!*" cried a score of voices, and "*Twang! twang! twang!*" went the shrill horn of the huntsman. The whips, too, stood in their stirrups, cracking their ponderous thongs, which sounded like guns upon the frosty air, and contributed their "*Get together! get together, hounds!*" "*Hark away!*" "*Hark away!*" "*Hark away!*" "*Hark!*" to the general uproar. Oh, what a row, what a riot, what a racket!

Watchorn being "in" for it, and recollecting how many saw a start who never thought of seeing a finish, immediately got his horse by the head, and singled himself out from the crowd now pressing at his horse's heels, determining, if the hounds didn't run into their fox in the park, to ride them off the scent at the very first opportunity. The "chumpine" being still alive within him, in the excitement of the moment he leaped the hand-gate leading out of the shrubberies into the park; the noise the horse made in taking off resembling the trampling on wood-pavement.

"Cuss it, but it's 'ard!" exclaimed he, as the horse slid two or three yards as he alighted on the frozen field.

George Cheek followed him; and Multum-in-Parvo, taking

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the bit deliberately between his teeth, just walked through the gate, as if it had been made of paper.

"Ah, ye *brute!*" groaned Mr. Sponge, in disgust, digging the Latchfords into his sides, as if he intended to make them meet in the middle. "Ah, ye *brute!*" repeated he, giving him a hearty cropper as he put up his head after trying to kick him off.

"Thank you!" exclaimed Miss Glitters, cantering up; adding, "you cleared the way nicely for me."

Nicely he had cleared it for them all; and the pent-up tide of equestrianism now poured over the park like the flood of an irrigated water-meadow. Such ponies! such horses! such hugging! such kicking! such scrambling! and so little progress with many!

The park being extensive—three hundred acres or more—there was ample space for the aspiring ones to single themselves out; and as Lady Scattercash and Orlando sat in the pony phaeton, on the rising ground by the keeper's house, they saw a dark-clad horseman (George Cheek), Old Gingerbread Boots, as they called Mr. Sponge, with Lucy Glitters alongside of him, gradually stealing away from the crowd, and creeping up to Mr. Watchorn, who was sailing away with the hounds.

"What a scrimmage!" exclaimed her ladyship, standing up in the carriage, and eyeing the

"Strange confusion in the vale below."

"There's Bob in his old purple," said she, eyeing her brother hustling along; "and there's 'Fat' in his new Moses and Son; and Bouncey in poor Wax's coat; and there's Harry all legs and wings, as usual," added she, as her husband was seen flibberty-gibbertying it along.

"And there's Lucy; and where's Miss Howard, I wonder?" observed Orlando, straining his eyes after the scrambling field.

Nothing but the inspiring aid of "chumpine," and the hope that the thing would soon terminate, sustained Mr. Watchorn under the infliction in which he so unexpectedly found himself; for nothing would have tempted him to brave such a frost with

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the burning scent of a game four-legged fox. The park being spacious, and enclosed by a high plank paling, he hoped the fox would have the manners to confine himself within it; and so long as his threadings and windings favoured the supposition, our huntsman bustled along, yelling and screaming in apparent ecstasy at the top of his voice. The hounds, to be sure, wanted keeping together, for Frantic as usual had shot ahead, while the gorged pig-pailers could never extricate themselves from the ponies.

"*F-o-o-o-r-r-a-r-d! f-o-o-o-r-r-a-r-d! f-o-o-o-r-r-a-r-d!*" elongated Watchorn, rising in his stirrups, and looking back with a grin at George Cheek, who was plying his weed with the whip, exclaiming, "Ah, you confounded young warmint, I'll give you a warmin'! I'll teach you to jaw about 'untin'!"

As he turned his head straight to look at his hounds, he was shocked to see Frantic falling backwards from a first attempt to leap the park-palings, and just as she gathered herself for a second effort, Desperate, Chatterer, and Galloper, charged in line and got over. Then came the general rush of the pack, attended with the usual success—some over, some back, some a-top of others.

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed Watchorn, pulling up short in a perfect agony of despair. "Oh, the devil!" repeated he in a lower tone, as Mr. Sponge approached.

"Where's there a gate?" roared our friend, skating up.

"Gate! there's never a gate within a mile, and that's locked," replied Watchorn, sulkily.

"Then here goes!" replied Mr. Sponge, gathering the chestnut together to give him an opportunity of purging himself of his previous *faux pas*. "Here goes!" repeated he, thrusting his hard hat firmly on his head. Taking his horse back a few paces, Mr. Sponge crammed him manfully at the palings, and got over with a rap.

"*Well done you!*" exclaimed Miss Glitters in delight; adding to Watchorn, "Now old Beardey, you go next."

Beardey was irresolute. He pretended to be anxious to get the tail hounds over.



Lucy Glitters among the way

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"Clear the way, then!" exclaimed Miss Glitters, putting her horse back, her bright eyes flashing as she spoke. She took him back as far as Mr. Sponge had done, touched him with the whip, and in an instant she was high in the air, landing safely on the far side.

"Hoo-ray!" exclaimed Captains Quod and Cutitfat, who now came panting up.

"Now, Mr. Watchorn!" cried Captain Seedybuck; adding, "you're a huntsman!"

"Yooi over, Prosperous! Yooi over, Buster!" cheered Watchorn, still pretending anxiety about his hounds.

"Let *me* have a shy," squeaked George Cheek, backing his giraffe, as he had seen Mr. Sponge and Miss Glitters do.

George took his screw by the head, and, giving him a hearty rib-roasting with his whip, run him full tilt at the palings, and carried away half a rood.

"Hoo-ray!" cried the liberated field.

"I knew how it would be," exclaimed Mr. Watchorn, in well-feigned disgust as he rode through the gap; adding, "confounded young waggabone! Deserves to be well *chaste*-tised for breakin' people's palin's in that way—lettin' in all the rubbishin' tail."

The scene then changed. In lieu of the green, though hard, sward of the undulating park, our friends now found themselves on large frozen fallows, upon whose uneven surface the heaviest horses made no impression, while the shuffling rats of ponies toiled and floundered about, almost receding in their progress. Mr. Sponge was just topping the fence out of the first one, and Miss Glitters was gathering her horse to ride at it, as Watchorn and Co. emerged from the park. Rounding the turnip-hill, beyond, the leading hounds were racing with a breast-high scent, followed by the pack in long-drawn file.

"What a mess!" said Watchorn to himself, shading the sun from his eyes with his hand; when, remembering his *rôle*, he exclaimed, "Y-o-o-n-der they go!" as if in ecstasies at the sight. Seeing a gate at the bottom of the field, he got his horse by the head, and rattled him across the fallow, blowing his horn more

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in hopes of stopping the pack than with a view of bringing up the tail-hounds. He might have saved his breath, for the music of the pack completely drowned the noise of the horn. "Dash it!" said he, thumping the broad end against his thigh; "I wish I was quietly back in my parlour. *Hold up, horse!*" roared he, as Harkaway nearly came on his haunches in pulling up at the gate. "I know who's *not* Cardinal Wiseman," continued he, stooping to open it.

The gate was fast, and he had to alight and lift it off its hinges. Just as he had done so, and had got it sufficiently open for a horse to pass, George Cheek came up from behind, and slipped through before him.

"Oh, you unrighteous young renegade! Did ever mortal see sich an uncivilised trick?" roared Watchorn; adding, as he climbed on to his horse again, and went spluttering through the frozen turnips after the offender, "You've no 'quaintance with Lord John Manners, I think!"

"Oh, dear!—oh, dear!" exclaimed he, as his horse nearly came on his head, "but this is the most punishin' affair I ever was in at. Puseyism's nothin' to it." And thereupon he indulged in no end of anathemas at Slarkey for bringing the wrong fox.

"About time to take soundings, and cast anchor, isn't it?" gasped Captain Bouncey, toiling up red hot on his pulling horse in a state of utter exhaustion, as Watchorn stood craneing and looking at a rasper through which Mr. Sponge and Miss Glitters had passed, without disturbing a twig.

"*C—a—s—t anchor!*" exclaimed Watchorn, in a tone of derision—"not this half hour yet, I hope!—not this *forty* minnits yet, I hope!—not this *hour* and *twenty* minnits yet, I hope!" continued he, putting his horse irresolutely at the fence. The horse blundered through it, barking Watchorn's nose with a branch.

"*'Ord rot it*, cut off my nose!" exclaimed he, muffling it up in his hand. "Cut off my nose clean by my face, I do believe," continued he, venturing to look into his hand for it. "Well," said he, eyeing the slight stain of blood on his glove, "this will be a lesson to me as long as I live. If ever I 'unt again in a

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frost, may I be——. Thank goodness! they've checked at last!" exclaimed he, as the music suddenly ceased, and Mr. Sponge and Miss Glitters sat motionless together on their panting, smoking steeds.

Watchorn then stuck spurs to his horse, and being now on a flat rushy pasture, with a bridle-gate into the field where the hounds were casting, he hustled across, preparing his horn for a blow as soon as he got there.

"*Twang—twang—twang—twang*," he went, riding up the hedgerow in the contrary direction to what the hounds leant. "*Twang—twang—twang*," he continued, inwardly congratulating himself that the fox would never face the troop of urchins he saw coming down with their guns.

"Hang him!—he's never that way!" observed Mr. Sponge, *sotto voce*, to Miss Glitters. "He's *never* that way," repeated he, seeing how Frantic flung to the right.

"*Twang—twang—twang*," went the horn, but the hounds regarded it not.

"Do, Mr. Sponge, put the hounds to me!" roared Mr. Watchorn, dreading lest they might hit off the scent.

Mr. Sponge answered the appeal by turning his horse the way the hounds were feathering, and giving them a slight cheer.

"*'Ord rot it!*" roared Watchorn, "*do* let 'em alone! That's a *fresh* fox! ours is over the 'ill," pointing towards Bonnyfield Hill.

"*Hoop!*" hallooed Mr. Sponge, taking off his hat, as Frantic hit off the scent to the right, and Galloper, and Melody, and all the rest scored to cry.

"Oh, you confounded brown-bouted beggar!" exclaimed Mr. Watchorn, returning his horn to its case, and eyeing Mr. Sponge and Miss Glitters sailing away with the again breast-high-scent pack. "Oh, you exorbitant usurer!" continued he, gathering his horse to skate after them. "Well now, that's the most disgraceful proceedin' I ever saw in the whole course of my life. Hang me, if I'll stand such work! Dash me, but I'll 'quaint the Queen! I'll tell Sir George Grey! I'll write to Mr. Walpole! *Fo-orrard! fo-orrard!*" hallooed he,

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as Bob Spangles and Bouncey popped upon him unexpectedly from behind, exclaiming with well-feigned glee, as he pointed to the streaming pack with his whip, "'Ord dash it, but we're in for a good thing!"

Little Bouncey's horse was still yawning and star-gazing, and Bouncey, being quite unequal to riding him and well-nigh exhausted, "downed" him against a rubbing-post in the middle of a field, making a "cannon" with his own and his horse's head, and was immediately the centre of attraction for the panting tail. Bouncey got near a pint of sherry from among them before he recovered from the shock. So anxious were they about him, that not one of them thought of resuming the chase. Even the lagging whips couldn't leave him. George Cheek was presently *hors de combat* in a hedge, and Watchorn seeing him "see-sawing," exclaimed, as he slipped through a gate,

"I'll send your mar to you, you young 'umbug."

Watchorn would gladly have stopped too, for the fumes of the champagne were dead within him, and the riding was becoming every minute more dangerous. He trotted on, hoping each jump of brown boots would be the last, and inwardly wishing the wearer at the devil. Thus he passed through a considerable extent of country, over Harrowdale Lordship, or reputed Lordship, past Roundington Tower, down Sloppyside Banks, and on to Cheeseington Green; the severity of his affliction being alone mitigated by the intervention of accommodating roads and lines of field gates. These, however, Mr. Sponge generally declined, and went crashing on, now over high places, now over low, just as they came in his way, closely followed by the fair Lucy Glitters.

"Well, I never see'd sich a man as that!" exclaimed Watchorn, eyeing Mr. Sponge clearing a stiff flight of rails, with a gap near at hand. "Nor woman nouter!" added he, as Miss Glitters did the like. "Well, I'm dashed if it arn't dangerous!" continued he, thumping his hand against his thick thigh, as the white nearly slipped upon landing. "*F-o-r-r-ard! for-rard! hoop!*" screeched he, as he saw Miss

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Glitters looking back to see where he was. "*F-o-r-rard ! for-rard !*" repeated he; adding, in apparent delight, "My eyes, but we're in for a stinger! *Hold up, horse !*" roared he, as his horse now went starring up to the knees through a long sheet of ice, squirting the clayey water into his rider's face. "*Hold up !*" repeated he; adding, "I'm dashed if one mightn't as well be crashin' over the Christial Palace as ridin' over a country froze in this way! 'Ord rot it, how cold it is!" continued he, blowing on his finger-ends; "I declare my 'ands are quite numb. Well done, old brown bouts!" exclaimed he, as a crash on the right attracted his attention; "well done, old brown bouts!—broke every bar i' the gate!" adding, "but I'll let Mr. Buckram know the way his beautiful osses are 'bused. Well," continued he, after a long skate down the grassy side of Ditchburn Lane, "there's no fun in this—none whatever. Who the deuce would be a huntsman that could be anything else? Dash it! I'd rayther be a hosier—I'd rayther be a 'atter—I'd rayther be an undertaker—I'd rayther be a Pusseyite parson—I'd rayther be a pig-jobber—I'd rather be a besom-maker—I'd rayther be a dog's-meat man—I'd rayther be a cat's-meat man—I'd rayther go about a sellin' of chickweed and sparrowgrass!" added he, as his horse nearly slipped up on his haunches.

"Thank 'eavens, there's relief at last!" exclaimed he, as on rising Gimmerhog Hill he saw Farmer Saintfoin's southdowns wheeling and clustering, indicative of the fox having passed; "thank 'eavens, there's relief at last!" repeated he, reining up his horse to see the hounds charge them.

Mr. Sponge and Miss Glitters were now in the bottom below, fighting their way across a broad mill-course with a very stiff fence on the taking-off side.

"*Hold up !*" roared Mr. Sponge, as having bored a hole through the fence, he found himself on the margin of the water-race. The horse did hold up, and landed him—not without a scramble—on the far side. "Run him at it, Lucy!" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, turning his horse half round to his fair companion. "Run him at it, Lucy!" repeated he; and Lucy, fortunately

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hitting the gap, skimmed o'er the water like a swallow on a summer's eve.

"Well done! *you're a trump!*" exclaimed Mr. Sponge, standing in his stirrups, and holding on by the mane as his horse rose the opposing hill.

He just got up in time to save the muttons; another second and the hounds would have been into them. Holding up his hand to beckon Lucy to stop, he sat eyeing them intently. Many of them had their heads up, and not a few were casting sheeps' eyes at the sheep. Some few of the line hunters were persevering with the scent over the greasy ground. It was a critical moment. They cast to the right, then to the left, and again took a wider sweep in advance, returning, however, towards the sheep, as if they thought them the best spec after all.

"Put 'em to me," said Mr. Sponge, giving Miss Glitters his whip; "put 'em to me!" said he, hallooing, "*Yor-geot*, hounds! —*yor-geot!*" which, being interpreted, means, "here again, hounds!—here again!"

"Oh, the concited beggar!" exclaimed Mr. Watchorn to himself, as, disappointed of his finish, he sat feeling his nose, mopping his face, and watching the proceedings. "Oh, the concited beggar!" repeated he; adding, "old 'hogany bouts is absolutely a goin' to kest them."

Cast them, however, he did, proceeding very cautiously in the direction the hounds seemed to lean. They were on a piece of cold scenting ground, across which they could hardly own the scent.

"Don't hurry 'em!" cried Mr. Sponge to Miss Glitters, who was acting whipper-in with rather unnecessary vigour.

As they got under the lee of the hedge, the scent improved a little, and, from an occasional feathering stern, a hound or two indulged in a whimper, until at length they fairly broke out in a cry.

"I'll lose a shoe," said Watchorn to himself, looking first at the formidable leap before him, and then to see if there was any one coming up behind. "I'll lose a shoe," said he. "No notion of lippin' of a navigable river—a downright arm of the sea," added he, getting off.

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"*Forward ! Forward !*" screeched Mr. Sponge, capping the hounds on, when away they went, heads up and sterns down as before.

"Ay, for-rard ! for-rard !" mimicked Mr. Watchorn ; adding, "you're for-rard enough, at all events."

After running about three-quarters of a mile at best pace, Mr. Sponge viewed the fox crossing a large grass field with all the steam up he could raise, a few hundred yards a-head of the pack, who were streaming along most beautifully, not viewing, but gradually gaining upon him. At last they broke from scent to view, and presently rolled him over and over among them.

"WHO-HOOP !" screamed Mr. Sponge, throwing himself off his horse and rushing in amongst them. "WHO-HOOP !" repeated he, still louder, holding the fox up in grim death above the baying pack.

"*Who-hoop !*" exclaimed Miss Glitters, reining up in delight alongside the chestnut. "*Who-hoop !*" repeated she, diving into the saddle-pocket for her lace-fringed handkerchief.

"Throw me my whip !" cried Mr. Sponge, repelling the attacks of the hounds from behind with his heels. Having got it, he threw the fox on the ground, and clearing a circle, he off with his brush in an instant. "Tear him and eat him !" cried he, as the pack broke in on the carcass. "Tear him and eat him !" repeated he, as he made his way up to Miss Glitters with the brush, exclaiming, "We'll put this in your hat, alongside the cock's feathers."

The fair lady leant towards him, and as he adjusted it becomingly in her hat, looking at her bewitching eyes, her lovely face, and feeling the sweet fragrance of her breath, a something shot through Mr. Sponge's pull-devil, pull-baker coat, his corduroy waistcoat, his Eureka shirt, Angola vest, and penetrated the very cockles of his heart. He gave her such a series of smacking kisses as startled her horse and astonished a poacher who happened to be hid in the adjoining hedge.

Sponge was never so happy in his life. He could have stood on his head, or been guilty of any sort of extravagance, short of wasting his money. Oh, he was happy ! Oh, he was joyous !

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He was intoxicated with pleasure. As he eyed his angelic charmer, her lustrous eyes, her glowing cheeks, her pearly teeth, the bewitching fulness of her elegant *tournure*, and thought of the masterly way she rode the run—above all, of the dashing style in which she charged the mill-race—he felt a something quite different to anything he had experienced with any of the buxom widows or lackadaisical misses whom he could just love or not, according to circumstances, among whom his previous experience had lain. Miss Glitters, he knew, had nothing, and yet he felt he could not do without her; the puzzlement of his mind was, how the deuce they should manage matters—“make tongue and buckle meet,” as he elegantly phrased it.

It is pleasant to hear a bachelor's *pros* and *cons* on the subject of matrimony; how the difficulties of the gentleman out of love vanish or change into advantages with the one in—“Oh, I would never think of marrying without a couple of thousand a year at the *very least*,” exclaims young Fastly. “*I can't do without four hunters and a hack. I can't do without a valet. I can't do without a brougham. I must belong to half-a-dozen clubs. I'll not marry any woman who can't keep me comfortable—bachelors can live upon nothing—bachelors are welcome everywhere—very different thing with a wife. Frightful things milliners' bills—fifty guineas for a dress, twenty for a bonnet—ladies' maids are the very devil—never satisfied—far worse to please than their mistresses.*” And between the whiffs of a cigar he hums the old saw,

“Needles and pins, needles and pins,
When a man marries his sorrow begins ”

Now take him on the other tack—Fast is smitten.

“’Ord hang it! a married man can live on very little,” soliloquises our friend. “A nice lovely creature to keep one at home. Hunting's all humbug; it's only the flash of the thing that makes one follow it. Then the danger far more than counterbalances the pleasure. Awful places one has to ride over, to be sure, or submit to be called ‘slow.’ Horrible thing



Mr. George Jackson Jones

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to set up for a horseman, and then have to ride to maintain one's reputation. Will be thankful to give it up altogether. The bays will make capital carriage-horses, and one can often pick up a second-hand carriage as good as new. Shall save no end of money by not having to put 'B' to my name in the assessed tax-paper. One club's as good as a dozen—will give up the Polyanthus and the Sunflower and the Refuge and the Rag. Ladies' dresses are cheap enough. Saw a beautiful gown t'other day for a guinea. Will start Master Bergamotte. Does nothing for his wages; will scarce clean my boots. Can get a chap for half what I give him, who'll do double the work. Will make Beans into coachman. What a convenience to have one's wife's maid to sew on one's buttons, and keep one's toes in one's stocking-feet! Declare I lose half my things at the washing for want of marking. Hanged if I won't marry and be respectable—marriage is an honourable state!" And there-upon Tom grows a couple of inches taller in his own conceit.

Though Mr. Sponge's thoughts did not travel in quite such a luxurious first-class train as the foregoing, he, Mr. Sponge, being more of a two-shirts-and-a-dicky sort of man, yet still the future ways and means weighed upon his mind, and calmed the transports of his present joy. Lucy was an angel; about that there was no dispute. He would make her Mrs. Sponge at all events. Touring about was very expensive. He could only counterbalance the extravagance of inns by the rigid rule of giving nothing to servants at private houses. He thought a nice airy lodging in the suburbs of London would answer every purpose, while his accurate knowledge of cab-fares would enable Lucy to continue her engagement at the Royal Amphitheatre without incurring the serious overcharges the inexperienced are exposed to. "Where one can dine, two can dine," mused Mr. Sponge; "and I make no doubt we'll manage matters somehow."

"Twopence for your thoughts!" cried Lucy, trotting up, and touching him gently on the back with her light silver-mounted riding-whip. "Twopence for your thoughts!" repeated she, as Mr. Sponge sauntered leisurely along, regardless of the

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bitter cold, followed by such of the hounds as chose to accompany him.

"Ah!" replied he, brightening up; "I was just thinking what a deuced good run we'd had."

"*Indeed!*" pouted the fair lady.

"No, my darling; I was thinking what a very pretty girl you are," rejoined he, sidling his horse up, and encircling her neat waist with his arm.

A sweet smile dimpled her plump cheeks, and chased the recollection of the former answer away.

It would not be pretty—indeed, we could not pretend to give even the outline of the conversation that followed. It was carried on in such broken and disjointed sentences, eyes and squeezes doing so much more work than words, that even a reporter would have had to draw largely upon his imagination for the substance. Suffice it to say, that though the thermometer was below zero, they never moved out of a foot's pace; the very hounds growing tired of the trail, and slinking off one by one as opportunity occurred.

A dazzling sun was going down with a blood-red glare, and the partially softened ground was fast resuming its fretwork of frost, as our hero and heroine were seen sauntering up the western avenue to Nonsuch House, as slowly and quietly as if it had been the hottest evening in summer.

"Here's old Coppertops!" exclaimed Captain Seedeystick, as, turning round in the billiard-room to chalk his cue, he espied them crawling along. "And Lucy!" added he, as he stood watching them.

"How slow they come!" observed Bob Spangles, going to the window.

"Must have tired their horses," suggested Captain Quod.

"Just the sort of man to tire a horse," rejoined Bob Spangles.

"Hate that Sponge," observed Captain Cutitfat.

"So do I," replied Captain Quod.

"Well, never mind the beggar! It's you to play!" exclaimed Bob Spangles to Captain Seedeystick.

But Lady Scattercash, who was observing our friends from

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her boudoir window, saw with a woman's eye that there was something more than a mere case of tired horses; and, tripping down stairs she arrived at the front door just as the fair Lucy dropped smilingly from her horse into Mr. Sponge's extended arms. Hurrying up into the boudoir, Lucy gave her ladyship one of Mr. Sponge's modified kisses, revealing the truth more eloquently than words could convey.

"Oh," Lady Scattercash was "so glad!" "so delighted!" "so charmed!"

Mr. Sponge was *such* a *nice* man, and *so rich*. She was sure he was rich—couldn't hunt if he wasn't. Would advise Lucy to have a good settlement, in case he broke his neck. And pin-money! pin-money was most useful; no husband ever let his wife have enough money. Must forget all about Harry Dacre and Charley Brown, and the swell in the Blues. Must be prudent for the future. Mr. Sponge would never know anything of the past. Then she reverted to the interesting subject of settlements. "What had Mr. Sponge got, and what would he do?" This Lucy couldn't tell. "What! hadn't he told her where his estates were?"—"No." "Well, was his dad dead?" This Lucy didn't know either. They had got no further than the tender prop. "Ah! well; would get it all out of him by degrees." And with the reiteration of her "so glads," and the repayment of the kiss Lucy had advanced, her ladyship advised her to get off her habit and make herself comfortable, while she ran down stairs to communicate the astonishing intelligence to the party below.

"What d'ye think?" exclaimed she, bursting into the billiard-room, where the party were still engaged in a game at pool, all our sportsmen, except Captain Cutitfat, who still sported his new Moses and Son's scarlet, having divested themselves of their hunting-gear—"What d'ye think?" exclaimed she, darting into the middle of them.

"That Bob don't cannon?" observed Captain Bouncey from below the bandage that encircled his broken head, nodding towards Bob Spangles, who was just going to make a stroke.

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"That Wax is out of limbo?" suggested Captain Seedeybuck, in the same breath.

"No. Guess again!" exclaimed Lady Scattercash, rubbing her hands in high glee.

"That the Pope's got a son?" observed Captain Quod.

"No. Guess again!" exclaimed her ladyship, laughing.

"I give it up," replied Captain Bouncey.

"So do I," added Captain Seedeybuck.

"*That Mr. Sponge is going to be married,*" enunciated her ladyship, slowly and emphatically, waving her arms.

"*Ho-o-ray!* Only think of that!" exclaimed Captain Quod.

"Old 'hogany-tops goin' to be spliced!"

"Did you ever?" asked Bob Spangles.

"No, I *never*," replied Captain Bouncey.

"He should be called Spooney Sponge, not Soapey Sponge," observed Captain Seedeybuck.

"Well, but to whom?" asked Captain Bouncey.

"Ah, to whom, indeed! That's the question," rejoined her ladyship archly.

"I know," observed Bob Spangles.

"No, you don't."

"Yes, I do."

"Who is it, then?" demanded her ladyship.

"Lucy Glitters, to be sure," replied Bob, who hadn't had his stare out of the billiard-room window for nothing.

"Pity her," observed Bouncey, sprawling along the billiard-table to play for a cannon.

"Why?" asked Lady Scattercash.

"Reg'lar scamp," replied Bouncey, vexed at missing his stroke.

"Dare say you know nothing about him," snapped her ladyship.

"Don't I?" replied Bouncey, complacently; adding, "that's all you know."

"He'll whop her, to a certainty," observed Seedeybuck.

"What makes you think that?" asked her ladyship.

"Oh—ha—hem—haw—why, because he whopped his poor

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horse—whopped him over the ears. Whop his horse, whop his wife; whop his wife, whop his horse. Reg'lar Rule-of-three sum."

"Make her a bad husband, I dare say," observed Bob Spangles, who was rather smitten with Lucy himself.

"Never mind; a bad husband's a deal better than none, Bob," replied Lady Scattercash, determined not to be put out of conceit of her man.

"*He, he, he!*—*haw, haw, haw!*—*ho, ho, ho!* Well done you!" laughed several.

"She'll have to keep him," observed Captain Cutitfat, whose turn it now was to play.

"What makes you think that?" asked Lady Scattercash, coming again to the charge.

"*He* has nothing," replied Fat, coolly.

"'Deed, but he has—a very good property, too," replied her ladyship.

"In *Air*shire, I should think," rejoined Fat.

"No, in *England*shire," retorted her ladyship; "and great expectations from an uncle," added she.

"Ah—he looks like a man to be on good terms with his uncle," sneered Captain Bouncey.

"Make no doubt he pays him many a visit," observed Seedeystick.

"Indeed! that's all you know," snapped Lady Scattercash.

"It's not all I know," replied Seedeystick.

"Well, then, what else do you know?" asked she.

"I know he has nothing," replied Seedeystick.

"How do you know it?"

"*I know*," said Seedeystick, with an emphasis, now settling to his stroke.

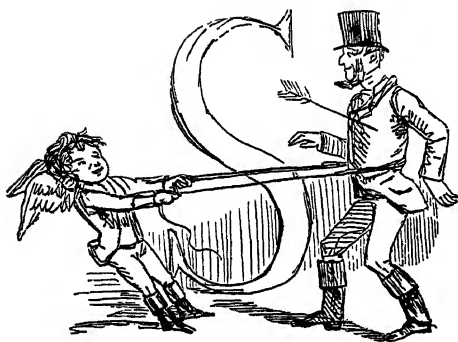
"Well, never mind," retorted her ladyship; "if he has nothing she has nothing, and nothing can be nicer."

So saying, she hurried out of the room.

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CHAPTER LXVII.

MR. SPONGE AT HOME.



Sponge "a Captive."

PONGE was most warmly congratulated by Sir Harry and all the assembled captains, who inwardly hoped his marriage would have the effect of "snuffing him out," as they said, and they had a most glorious jollification on the strength of it. They drank Lucy's and his

health nine times over, with nine times nine each time. The consequence was, that the footmen and shutter were in earlier requisition than usual to carry them to their respective apartments. Sponge's head throbbed a good deal the next morning; nor was the pulsation abated by the recollection of his matrimonial engagement, and his total inability to keep the angel who had ridden herself into his affections. However, like all untried men, he was strong in the confidence of his own ability, and the sight of his smiling charmer chased away all prudential considerations as quickly as they arose. He made no doubt there would something turn up.

Meanwhile, he was in good quarters, and Lady Scattercash having warmly espoused his cause, he assumed a considerable standing in the establishment. Old Beardey having ventured to complain of his interference in the kennel, my lady curtly

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told him he might "make himself scarce if he liked;" a step that Beardey was quite ready to take, having heard of a desirable public-house at Newington Butts, provided Sir Harry paid him his wages. This not being quite convenient, Sir Harry gave him an order on "Cabbage and Co." for three suits of clothes, and acquiesced in his taking a massive silver soup-tureen, on which, beneath the many-quartered Scattercash arms, Mr. Watchorn placed an inscription, stating that it was presented to him by Sir Harry Scattercash, Baronet, and the noblemen and gentlemen of his hunt, in admiration of his talents as a huntsman and his character as a man.

Mr. Sponge then became still more at home. It was very soon "my hounds," and "my horses," and "my whips;" and he wrote to Jawleyford, and Puffington, and Guano, and Lumpleg, and Washball, and Spraggon, offering to make meets to suit their convenience, and even to mount them if required. His "Mogg" was quite neglected in favour of Lucy; and it says much for the influence of female charms that, before they had been engaged a fortnight, he, who had been a perfect oracle in cab-fares, would have been puzzled to tell the most ordinary fare on the most frequented route. He had forgotten all about them. Nevertheless, Lucy and he went out hunting as often as they could raise hounds, and when they had a good run and killed, he saluted her; and when they didn't kill, why—he just did the same. He headed and tailed the stringing pack, drafted the skirter and babblers (which he sent to Lord Scamperdale, with his compliments), and presently had the uneven kennel in something like shape.

Nor was this the only way in which he made himself useful, for Nonsuch House being now supported almost entirely by voluntary contributions—that is to say, by the gullibility of tradesmen,—his street and shop knowledge was valuable in determining who to "do." With the Post-office Directory and Mr. Sponge at his elbow, Mr. Bottleends, the butler—"delirius tremendous," as Bottleends called it, having quite incapacitated Sir Harry—wrote off for champagne from this man, sherry from that, turtle from a third, turbot from a fourth, tea from a fifth,

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truffles from a sixth; wax-lights from one, sperm from another; and down came the things with such alacrity, such thanks for the past and hopes for the future, as we poor devils of the untitled world are quite unacquainted with. Nay, not content with giving him the goods, many of the poor demented creatures actually paraded their folly at their doors in new deal packing-cases, flourishingly directed "To SIR HARRY SCATTERCASH, BART., NONSUCH HOUSE, &c. *By Express Train.*" In some cases they even paid the carriage.

And here, in the midst of love, luxury, and fox-hunting, let us for a time leave our enterprising friend, Mr. Sponge, while we take a look at a species of cruelty that some people call "sport." For this purpose we will begin a fresh chapter.



Voluntary Contributions.

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CHAPTER LXVIII.

HOW THEY GOT UP THE GRAND ARISTOCRATIC STEEPLE-CHASE.



HERE is no saying what advantages railway communication may confer upon a country. But for the Granddiddle Junction, —shire never would have had a steeple-chase—an “Aristocratic,” at least—for it is observable that the more snobbish a thing is, the more certain they are to call it aristocratic. When it is too bad for anything, they call it “Grand.” Well, as we said before, but for the Granddiddle Junction, —shire would never have had a “Grand Aristocratic Steeple-Chase.” A few friends or farmers might have got up a quiet thing among themselves, but it would never have seen a regular trade transaction, with its swell-mob, sham captains, and all the paraphernalia of odd laying, “secret tips,” and market rigging. Who will deny the benefit that must accrue to any locality by the infusion of all the loose fish of the kingdom?

Formerly the prize-fights were the perquisite of the publicans. They it was who arranged for Shaggy Tom to pound Hairy Billy's nob upon So-and-so's land, the preference being given to the locality that subscribed the most money to the fight. Since the decline of “the ring,” steeplechasing, and that smaller grade of gambling—coursing, have come to their aid. Nine-tenths of the steeple-chases and coursing-matches are got up by innkeepers, for the good of their houses. Some of the town publicans, indeed, seem to think that the country was just made for their matches to come off in, and scarcely condescend

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to ask the leave of the landowners. We saw an advertisement the other day, where a low publican, in a manufacturing town, assured the subscribers to his coursing-club that he would take care to select open ground, with "plenty of stout hares," as if all the estates in the neighbourhood were at his command. Another advertised a steeple-chase in the centre of a good hunting country—"amateur and gentlemen riders"—with a half-crown ordinary at the end! Fancy the respectability of a steeple-chase with a half-crown ordinary at the end!

Our "Aristocratic" was got up on the good-of-the-house principle. Whatever benefit the Granddiddle Junction conferred upon the country at large, it had a very prejudicial effect upon the Old Duke of Cumberland Hotel and Posting-House, which it left high and dry at an angle sufficiently near to be tantalised by the whirr and whistle of the trains, and yet too far off to be benefited by the parties they brought. This once well-accustomed hostelry was kept by one Mr. Viney, a former butler in the Scattercash family, and who still retained the usual "old and faithful servant" *entrée* of Nonsuch House, having his beef-steak and bottle of wine in the steward's room whenever he chose to call. Viney had done good at the Old Duke of Cumberland; and no one, seeing him "full fig," would recognise, in the solemn grandeur of his stately person, the dirty knife-boy who had filled the place now occupied by the still dirtier Slarkey. But the days of road travelling departed, and Viney, who, beneath the Grecian-columned portico of his country-house-looking hotel, modulated the ovations of his cauliflower head to every description of traveller—from the lordly occupant of the barouche and four, down to the humble sitter in a gig—was cut off by one fell swoop from all further traffic. He was extinguished like a gaslight, and the pipe was laid on a fresh line.

Fortunately Mr. Viney was pretty warm; he had done pretty well; and having enjoyed the intimacy of the great "Jeames" of railway times, had got a hint not to engage the hotel beyond the opening of the line. Consequently, he now had the great

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house for a mere nothing until such times as the owner could convert it into that last refuge for deserted houses—an academy, or a “young ladies’ seminary.” Mr. Viney now, having plenty of leisure, frequently drove his “missis” (once a lady’s maid in a quality family) up to Nonsuch House, as well for the sake of the airing—for the road was pleasant and picturesque—as to see if he could get the “little trifle” Sir Harry owed him for post-horses, bottles of soda-water, and such trifles as country gentlemen run up scores for at their posting houses,—scores that seldom get smaller by standing. In these excursions Mr. Viney made the acquaintance of Mr. Watchorn; and a huntsman being a character with whom even the landlord of an inn—we beg pardon, hotel and posting-house—may associate without degradation, Viney and Watchorn became intimate. Watchorn sympathised with Viney, and never failed to take a glass in passing, either at exercise or out hunting, to deplore that such a nice-looking house, so “near the station, too,” should be ruined as an inn. It was after a more than usual libation that Watchorn, trotting merrily along with the hounds, having accomplished three blank days in succession, asked himself, as he looked upon the surrounding vale from the rising ground of Hammercock Hill, with the cream-coloured station and the rose-coloured hotel peeping through the trees, whether something might not be done to give the latter a lift. At first he thought of a pigeon-match—a sweepstake open to all England—fifty members say, at two pound ten each, seven pigeons, seven sparrows, twenty-one yards rise, two ounces of shot, and so on. But then, again, he thought there would be a difficulty in getting guns. A coursing match—how would that do? Answer: “No hares.” The farmers had made such an outcry about the game, that the landowners had shot them all off, and now the farmers were grumbling that they couldn’t get a course.

“Dash my buttons!” exclaimed Watchorn; “it would be the very thing for a steeple-chase! There’s old Puff’s hounds, and old Scamp’s hounds, and these hounds,” looking down on the ill-sorted lot around him; “and the deuce is in it if we

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couldn't give the thing such a start as would bring down the lads of the 'village,' and a vast amount of good business might be done. I'm dashed if it isn't the very country for a steeple-chase!" continued Watchorn, casting his eye over Cloverley Park, round the enclosure of Langworth Grange, and up the rising ground of Lark Lodge.

The more Watchorn thought of it, the more he was satisfied of its feasibility, and he trotted over, the next day, to the Old Duke of Cumberland, to see his friend on the subject. Viney, like most victuallers, was more given to games of skill—billiards, shuttlecock, skittles, dominoes, and so on—than to the rude out-of-door chances of flood and field, and at first he doubted his ability to grapple with the details; but on Mr. Watchorn's assurance that he would keep him straight, he gave Mrs. Viney a key, desiring her to go into the inner cellar, and bring out a bottle of the green seal. This was ninety-shilling sherry—very good stuff to take; and, by the time they got into the second bottle, they had got into the middle of the scheme too. Viney was cautious and thoughtful. He had a high opinion of Watchorn's sagacity, and so long as Watchorn confined himself to weights, and stakes, and forfeits, and so on, he was content to leave himself in the hands of the huntsman; but when Watchorn came to talk of "stewards," putting this person and that together, Viney's experience came in aid. Viney knew a good deal. He had not stood twisting a napkin negligently before a plate-loaded sideboard without picking up a good many waifs and strays in the shape of those ins and outs, those likings and dislikings, those hatreds and jealousies, that foolish people let fall so freely before servants, as if for all the world the servants were sideboards themselves; and he had kept up his stock of service-gained knowledge by a liberal, though not a dignity-compromising intercourse—for there is no greater aristocrat than your out-of-livery servant—among the upper servants of all the families in the neighbourhood, so that he knew to a nicety who would pull together and who wouldn't, whose name it would not do to mention to this person, and who it would not do to apply to before that.

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Neither Watchorn nor Viney being sportsmen, they thought they had nothing to do but apply to two friends who were; and after thinking over who hunted in couples, they were unfortunate enough to select our Flat Hat friends, Fyle and Fossick. Fyle was indignant beyond measure at being asked to be steward to a steeple-chase, and thrust the application into the fire; while Fossick just wrote below, "I'll see you hanged first," and sent it back without putting even a fresh head on the envelope. Nothing daunted, however, they returned to the charge, and without troubling the reader with unnecessary detail, we think it will be generally admitted that they at length made an excellent selection in Mr. Puffington, Guano, and Tom Washball.

Fortune favoured them also in getting a locality to run in, for Timothy Scourgefield, of Broom Hill, whose farm commanded a good circular three miles of country, with every variety of obstacle, having thrown up his lease for a thirty-percent. reduction—a giving up that had been most unhandsomely accepted by his landlord—Timothy was most anxious to pay him off by doing every conceivable injury to the farm, than which nothing can be more promising than having a steeple-chase run over it. Scourgefield, therefore, readily agreed to let Viney and Watchorn do whatever they liked, on condition that he received entrance-money at the gate.

The name occupied their attention some time, for it did not begin as the "Aristocratic." The "Great National," the "Grand Naval and Military," the "Sportsman," the "Tallisho," the "Out-and-Out-er," the "Swell," were all considered and canvassed, and its being called the "Aristocratic" at length turned upon whether they got Lord Scamperdale to subscribe or not. This was accomplished by a deferential call by Mr. Viney upon Mr. Spraggon, with a little bill for three pound odd, which he presented with the most urgent request that Jack wouldn't think of it then—any time that was most convenient to Mr. Spraggon—and then the introduction of the neatly-headed sheet-list. It was lucky that Viney was so easily satisfied, for poor Jack had only thirty shillings, of which he owed his washerwoman eight, and he was very glad to stuff

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Viney's bill into his stunner jacket-pocket, and apply himself exclusively to the contemplated steeple-chase.

Like most of us, Jack had no objection to make a little money; and as he squinted his frightful eyes inside out at the paper, he thought over what horses they had in the stable that were like the thing; and then he sounded Viney as to whether he would put him one up for nothing, if he could induce his lordship to send. This, of course, Viney readily assented to, and again requesting Jack not to *think* of his little bill till it was *perfectly* convenient to him—a favour that Jack was pretty sure to accord him—Mr. Viney took his departure, Jack undertaking to write him the result. The next day's post brought Viney the document—unpaid, of course—with a great “Scamperdale” scrawled across the top; and forthwith it was decided that the steeple-chase should be called the “Grand Aristocratic.” Other names quickly followed, and it soon assumed an importance. Advertisements appeared in all the sporting and would-be sporting papers, headed with the imposing names of the stewards, secretary, and clerk of the course, Mr. Viney. The “Grand Aristocratic Stakes,” of 20 sovs. each, half-forfeit, and 5*l.* only if declared, &c. The winner to give two dozen of champagne to the ordinary, and the second horse to save his stake. Gentlemen riders (titled ones to be allowed 3 lbs.). Over about three miles of fine hunting country, under the usual steeple-chase conditions.

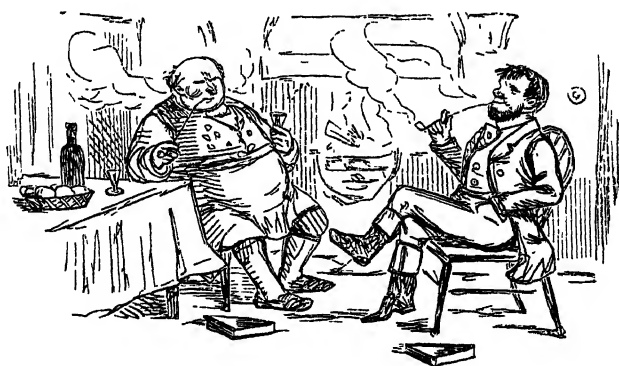
Then the game of the “Peeping Toms,” and “Sly Sams,” and “Infallible Joes,” and “Wide-awake Jems,” with their tips and distribution of prints began; Tom counselling his numerous and daily increasing clients to get well on to No. 9, Sardanapalus (the Bart., as Watchorn called him), while “Infallible Joe” recommended his friends and patrons to be sweet on No. 6 (Hercules), and “Wide-awake Jem” was all for something else. A gentleman who took the trouble of getting tips from half a dozen of them, found that no two of them agreed in any particular. What information to make books upon!

“But what good,” as our excellent friend Thackeray eloquently

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asks, "ever came out of, or went into, a betting book? If I could be CALIPH OMAR for a week," says he, "I would pitch every one of those despicable manuscripts into the flames; from my-lord's, who is 'in' with Jack Snaffle's stable, and is overreaching worse-informed rogues, and swindling green-horns, down to Sam's, the butcher's boy, who books eighteen-penny odds in the tap-room, and stands to win five-and-twenty bob." We say ditto to that, and are not sure that we wouldn't hang a "leg" or a "list" man or two into the bargain.

Watchorn had a prophet of his own, one Enoch Wriggle, who, having tried his hand unsuccessfully first at tailoring, next as an accountant, then in the water-cress, afterwards in the buy "'at-box, bonnet-box," and lastly in the stale lobster and periwinkle line, had set up as an oracle on turf matters, forwarding the most accurate and infallible information to flats in exchange for half-crowns, heading his advertisements, "If it be a sin to covet honour, I am the most offending soul alive!" Enoch did a considerable stroke of business, and couched his advice in such dubious terms, as generally to be able to claim a victory whichever way the thing went. So the "offending soul" prospered; and from scarcely having shoes to his feet, he very soon set up a gig.



Getting up "The Grand Aristocratic."

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CHAPTER LXIX.

HOW THE GRAND ARISTOCRATIC CAME OFF.



STEEPLE-CHASES are generally crude, ill-arranged things. Few sportsmen will act as stewards a second time; while the victim to the popular delusion of patronising our "national sports" considers—like gentlemen who have served the office of sheriff, or churchwarden—that once in a lifetime is enough; hence, there is always the air of amateur actorship about them. There is always something wanted or forgotten. Either they forget the ropes, or they forget the scales, or they forget the weights, or they forget the bell, or—more commonly still—some of the party forget themselves. Farmers, too, are easily satisfied with the benefits of an irresponsible mob careering over their farms, even though some of them are attired in the miscellaneous garb of hunting and racing costume. Indeed, it is just this mixture of two sports that spoils both; steeple-chasing being neither hunting nor racing. It has not the wild excitement of the one, nor the accurate calculating qualities of the other. The very horses have a peculiar air about them—neither hunters nor hacks, nor yet exactly race-horses. Some of them, doubtless, are fine, good-looking, well-conditioned animals; but the majority are lean, lathy, sunken-eyed, woe-begone, iron-marked, desperately-abused brutes, lacking all the lively energy that characterises the movements of the up-to-the-mark hunter. In the early days of steeple-chasing a popular fiction existed that the horses were hunters; and grooms and

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fellows used to come nicking and grinning up to masters of hounds at checks and critical times, requesting them to note that they were out, in order to ask for certificates of the horses having been "regularly hunted,"—a species of regularity than which nothing could be more irregular. That nuisance, thank goodness, is abated. A steeple-chaser now generally stands on his own merits; a change for which sportsmen may be thankful.

But to our story.

The whole country was in a commotion about this "Aristocratic." The unsophisticated looked upon it as a grand *r union* of the aristocracy; and smart bonnets and cloaks, and jackets and parasols were ordered with the liberality incident to a distant view of Christmas. As Viney sipped his sherry-cobbler of an evening, he laughed at the idea of a son-of-a-day labourer like himself raising such a dust. Letters came pouring in to the clerk of the course from all quarters; some asking about beds; some about breakfasts; some about stakes; some about stables; some about this thing, some about that. Every room in the Old Duke of Cumberland was speedily bespoke. Post-horses rose in price, and Dobbin and Smiler, and Jumper and Cappy, and Jessy and Tumbler were jobbed from the neighbouring farmers, and converted for the occasion into posters. At last came the great and important day—day big with the fate of thousands of pounds; for the betting-list vermin had been plying their trade briskly throughout the kingdom, and all sorts of rumours had been raised relative to the qualities and condition of the horses.

Who doesn't know the chilling feel of an English spring, or rather of a day at the turn of the year before there is any spring? Our gala-day was a perfect specimen of the order—a white frost, succeeded by a bright sun, with an east wind, warming one side of the face and starving the other. It was neither a day for fishing, nor hunting, nor coursing, nor anything but farming. The country, save where there were a few lingering patches of turnips, was all one dingy drab, with abundant scalds on the undrained fallows. The grass was

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more like hemp than anything else. The very rushes were yellow and sickly.

Long before midday the whole country was in commotion. The same sort of people commingled that one would expect to see if there was a balloon to go up, and a man to go down, or be hung at the same place. Fine ladies in all the colours of the rainbow; and swarthy, beady-eyed dames, with their stalwart, big-calved, basket-carrying comrades; genteel young people from behind the counter; Dandy Candy merchants from behind the hedge; rough-coated dandies with their silver-mounted whips, and Shaggyford roughs, in their baggy, poacher-like coats, and formidable clubs; carriages and four, and carriages and pairs; and gigs, and dogcarts, and Whitechapels, and Newport Pagnells, and long carts, and short carts, and donkey-carts, converged from all quarters upon the point of attraction at Broom Hill.

If Farmer Scourgefield had made a mob, he could not have got one that would be more likely to do damage to his farm than this steeple-chase one. Nor was the assemblage confined to the people of the country, for the Granddiddle Junction, by its connexion with the great network of railways, enabled all patrons of this truly national sport to sweep down upon the spot like flocks of wolves; and train after train disgorged a generous mixture of sharps and flats, commingling with coatless, baggy-breeched vagabonds, the emissaries most likely of the Peeping Toms and Infallible Joes, if not the worthies themselves.

"Dear, but it's a *noble* sight!" exclaimed Viney to Watchorn, as they sat on their horses, below a rickety green-baize covered scaffold, labelled, "GRAND STAND; admission, Two-and-six-pence," raised against Scourgefield's stack-yard wall, eyeing the population pouring in from all parts. "Dear, but it's a *noble* sight!" said he, shading the sun from his eyes, and endeavouring to identify the different vehicles in the distance. "Yonder's the 'bus comin' again," said he, looking towards the station, "loaded like a market-gardener's turnip-waggon. That'll *pay*," added he, with a knowing leer at the landlord of



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the Hen Angel, Newington Butts. "And who have we here, with the four horses and sky-blue flunkies? Jawleyford, as I live!" added he, answering himself; adding, "The beggar had better pay me what he owes."

How great Mr. Viney was! Some people, who have never had anything to do with horses, think it incumbent upon them, when they have, to sport top-boots, and accordingly, for the first time in his life, Viney appears in a pair of remarkably hard, tight, country-made boots, above which are a pair of baggy, white cords, with the dirty finger-marks of the tailor still upon them. He sports a single-breasted green cutaway coat, with basket-buttons, a black satin roll-collared waistcoat, and a new white silk hat, that shines in the bright sun like a fish-kettle. His blue-striped kerchief is secured by a butterfly brooch. Who ever saw an innkeeper that could resist a brooch?

He is riding a miserable rat of a badly-clipped, mouse-coloured pony, that looks like a velocipede under him.

His companion, Mr. Watchorn, is very great, and hardly condescends to know the country people who claim his acquaintance as a huntsman. He is a *Hotel Keeper*—master of the Hen Angel, Newington Butts. Enoch Wriggle stands beside them, dressed in the imposing style of a cockney sportsman. He has been puffing "Sir Danapalus (the Bart.*)" in public, and taking all the odds he can get against him in private. Watchorn knows that it is easier to make a horse lose than win. The restless-looking, lynx-eyed caitiff, in the dirty green shawl, with his hands stuffed into the front pockets of the brown tarriar coat, is their jockey, the renowned Captain Hangallows; he answers to the name of Sam Slick in Mr. Spavin, the horse-dealer's yard in Oxford Street, when not in the country on similar excursions to the present. And now in the throng on the principal line are two conspicuous horses—a piebald and a white—carrying Mr. Sponge and Lucy Glitters. Lucy appears as she did on the frosty-day hunt, glowing with health and beauty, and rather straining the seams of Lady Scattercash's habit with the additional *embonpoint* she

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has acquired by early hours in the country. She has made Mr. Sponge a white silk jacket to ride in, which he has on under his grey tarriar coat, and a cap of the same colour is in his hard hat. He has discarded the gosling-green cords for cream-coloured leathers, and, to please Lucy, has actually substituted a pair of rose-tinted tops for the "'hogany bouts." Altogether he is a great swell, and very like the bridegroom.

But hark—what a crash! The leaders of Sir Harry Scatter-cash's drag start at a blind fiddler's dog stationed at the gate leading into the fields, a wheel catches the post, and in an instant the sham captains are scattered about the road:—Bouncey on his head, Seedeystick across the wheelers, Quod on his back, and Sir Harry astride the gate. Meanwhile, the old fiddler, regardless of the shouts of the men and the shrieks of the ladies, scrapes away with the appropriate tune of "The Devil among the Tailors!" A rush to the horses' heads arrests further mischief, the dislodged captains are at length righted, the nerves of the ladies composed, and Sir Harry once more essays to drive them up the hill to the stand. That feat being accomplished, then came the unloading, and consternation, and huddling of the tight-laced occupants at the idea of these female *women* coming amongst them, and the usual peeping, and spying, and eyeing of the "*creatures*." "What impudence!" "Well, I think!" "'Pon my word!" "What next!"—exclamations that were pretty well lost upon the fair objects of them amid the noise and flutter and confusion of the scene. But hark again! What's up now?

"Hooray!" "hooray!" "*h-o-o-o-ray*!" "Three cheers for the Squire! *H-o-o-o-ray*!" Old Puff as we live! The "amazin' instance of a pop'lar man" greeted by the Swillingford snobs. The old frostbitten dandy is flattered by the cheers, and bows condescendingly ere he alights from the well-appointed mail phaeton. See how graciously the ladies receive him, as, having ascended the stairs, he appears among them. "A man is never too old to marry" is their maxim.

The cry is still, "They come! they come!" See, at a hand-gallop, with his bay pony in a white lather, rides Pacey, grinning

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from ear to ear, with his red-backed betting-book peeping out of the breast pocket of his brown cutaway. He is staring and gaping to see who is looking at him.

Pacey has made such a book as none but a wooden-headed boy like himself could make. He has been surfeited with tips. Peeping Tom had advised him to back Daddy Longlegs ; and, *nullus error*, Sneaking Joe has counselled him that the "Baronet" will be "California without cholera, and gold without danger ;" while Jemmy something, the jockey, who advertises that his "tongue is not for falsehood framed," though we should think it was framed for nothing else, has urged him to back Parvo to half the amount of the national debt.

Altogether, Pacey has made such a mess that he cannot possibly win, and may lose almost any sum from a thousand pounds down to a hundred and eighty. Mr. Sponge has got well on with him, through the medium of Jack Spraggon.

Pacey is now going to what he calls "compare"—see that he has got his bets booked right ; and, throwing his right leg over his cob's neck, he blobs on to the ground ; and leaving the pony to take care of itself, disappears in the crowd.

What a hubbub ! what roarings, and shoutings, and recognisings ! "Bless my heart ! who'd have thought of seeing you ?" and, "By jingo ! what's sent *you* here ?"

"My dear Waffles," cries Jawleyford, rushing up to our Laverick Wells friend (who is looking very debauched), "I'm overjoyed to see you. Do come upstairs and see Mrs. Jawleyford and the dear girls. It was only last night we were talking about you." And so Jawleyford hurries Mr. Waffles off, just as Waffles is *in extremis* about his horse.

Looking around the scene there seems to be everybody that we have had the pleasure of introducing to the reader in the course of Mr. Sponge's Tour. Mr. and Mrs. Springwheat in their dogcart, Mrs. Springey's figure looking as though "wheat had got above forty, my lord ;" old Jog and his handsome wife in the ugly old phaeton, well garnished with children, and a couple of sticks in the rough peeping out of the apron, Gustavus James held up in his mother's arms, with the curly blue feather

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nodding over his nose. There is also Farmer Peastraw, and faces that a patient inspection enables us to appropriate to Dribble, and Hook, and Capon, and Calcot, and Lumpleg, and Crane of Crane Hall, and Charley Slapp of red-coat times—people look so different in plain clothes to what they do in hunting ones. Here, too, is George Cheek, running down with perspiration, having run over from Dr. Latheringington's, for which he will most likely "catch it" when he gets back; and oh, wonder of wonders, here's Robert Foozle himself!

"Well, Robert, you've come to the steeple-chase?"

"Yes, I've come to the steeple-chase."

"Are you fond of steeple-chases?"

"Yes, I'm fond of steeple-chases."

"I daresay, you never were at one before," observes his mother.

"No, I never was at one before," replies Robert.

And though last not least, here's Facey Romford, with his arm in a sling, on Mr. Hobler, come to look after that sivin-p'und-ten, which we wish he may get.

Hark! there's a row below the stand, and Viney is seen in a state of excitement inquiring for Mr. Washball. Pacey has objected to a gentleman rider, and Guano and Puffington have differed on the point. A nice, slim, well-put-on lad (Buckram's roughrider) has come to the scales and claimed to be allowed 3lbs. as the Honourable Captain Boville. Finding the point questioned, he abandons the "handle," and sinks into plain Captain Boville. Pacey now objects to him altogether.

"S-c-e-u-s-e me, sir; s-c-e-u-s-e me, sir," simpers our friend Dick Bragg, sidling up to the objector with a sort of tendency of his turn-back-wristed hand to his hat. "S-c-e-u-s-e me, sir; s-c-e-u-s-e me," repeats he, "but I think you was wrong, sir, in objecting to Captain Boville, sir, as a gen'l'man rider, sir."

"*Why?*" demands Pacey, in the full flush of victory.

"Oh, sir—because, sir—in fact, sir—he *is* a gen'l'man, sir."

"*Is* a gentleman! How do *you* know?" demands Pacey, in the same tone as before.

"Oh, sir, he's a gen'l'man—an undoubted gen'l'man. Every-

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thing about him shows that. Does nothing — breeches by Anderson—boots by Bartley ; besides which, he drinks wine every day, and has a whole box of cigars in his bedroom. But don't take my word for it, pray," continued Bragg, seeing Pacey was wavering ; "don't take my word for it, pray. There's a gen'l'man, a countryman of his somewhere about," added he, looking anxiously into the surrounding crowd—"there's a gen'l'man, a countryman of his somewhere about, if we could but find him," Bragg standing on his tiptoes, and exclaiming, "Mr. Buckram ! Mr. Buckram ! Has anybody seen anything of Mr. Buckram !"

"*Here !*" replied a meek voice from behind ; upon which there was an elbowing through the crowd, and presently a most respectable, rosy-gilled, grey-haired, hawbuck-looking man, attired in a new brown cutaway, with bright buttons and a velvet collar, with a buff waistcoat, came twirling an ash-stick in one hand, and fumbling the silver in his drab trousers pocket with the other, in front of the bystanders.

"Oh ! 'ere he is !" exclaimed Bragg, appealing to the stranger with a hasty "*You know Captain Boville, don't you ?*"

"Why, now, as to the matter of that," replied the gentleman, gathering all the loose silver up into his hand, and speaking very slowly, just as a country gentleman, who has all the live-long day to do nothing in, may be supposed to speak—"Why, now, as to the matter of that," said he, eyeing Pacey intently, and beginning to drop the silver slowly as he spoke, "I can't say that I've any very 'ticklar 'quaintance with the captin. I knows him, in course, just as one knows a neighbour's son. The captin's a good deal younger nor me," continued he, raising his new eight-and-sixpenny Parisian, as if to show his sandy grey hair. "I'm a'most sixty ; and he, I daresay, is little more nor twenty," dropping a half-crown as he said it. "But the captin's a nice young gent—a nice young gent, without any blandishment, I should say ; and that's more nor one can say of all young gents now-a-days," said Buckram, looking at Pacey as he spoke, and dropping two consecutive half-crowns.

"Why, but you live near him, don't you ?" interrupted Bragg.

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"Near him," repeated Buckram, feeling his well-shaven chin thoughtfully. "Why, yes—that's to say, near his dad. The fact is," continued he, "I've a little independence of my own," dropping a heavy five-shilling piece as he said it, "and his father—old Bo, as I call him—adjoins me; and if either of us 'appen to have a *battue*, or a 'aunch of wenzun, and a few friends, we inwite each other, and wicey wersey, you know," letting off a lot of shillings and sixpences. And just at the moment the blind fiddler struck up "The Devil among the Tailors," when the shouts and laughter of the mob closed the scene.

And now gentlemen, who heretofore have shown no more of the jockey than Cinderella's feet in the early part of the pantomime disclose of her ball attire, suddenly cast off the pea-jackets and bearskin wraps, and shawls and overcoats of winter, and shine forth in all the silken flutter of summer heat.

We know of no more humiliating sight than misshapen gentlemen playing at jockeys. Playing at soldiers is bad enough, but playing at jockeys is infinitely worse—above all, playing at steeple-chase jockeys, combining, as they generally do, all the worst features of the hunting-field and racecourse—unsympathising boots and breeches, dirty jackets that never fit, and caps that won't keep on. What a farce to see the great bulky fellows go to scale with their saddles strapped to their backs, as if to illustrate the impossibility of putting a round of beef upon a pudding-plate!

But the weighed-in ones are mounting. See, there's Jack Spraggon getting a hoist on to Daddy Longlegs! Did ever mortal see such a man for a jockey? He has cut off the laps of a stunner tartan jacket, and looks like a great backgammon-board. He has got his head into an old gold-banded military foraging-cap, which comes down almost on to the rims of his great tortoiseshell spectacles. Lord Scamperdale stands with his hand on the horse's mane, talking earnestly to Jack, doubtless giving him his final instructions. Other jockeys emerge from various parts of the farm-buildings; some out of stables; some out of cow-houses; others from beneath cart-sheds. The scene becomes enlivened with the varied colours of the riders—

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red, yellow, green, blue, violet, and stripes without end. Then comes the usual difficulty of identifying the parties, many of whose mothers wouldn't know them.

"That's Captain Tongs," observes Miss Simperley, "in the blue. I remember dancing with him at Bath, and he did nothing but talk about steeple-chasing."

"And who's that in yellow?" asks Miss Hardy.

"That's Captain Gander," replies the gentleman on her left.

"Well, I think he'll win," replies the lady.

"I'll bet you a pair of gloves he doesn't," snaps Miss Moore, who fancies Captain Pusher, in the pink.

"What a squat little jockey!" exclaims Miss Hamilton, as a little dumpling of a man in Lincoln green is led past the stand on a fine bay horse, some one recognising the rider as our old friend Caingey Thornton.

"And look who comes here!" whispers Miss Jawleyford to her sister, as Mr. Sponge, having accomplished a mount without derangement of temper, rides Hercules quietly past the stand, his whip-hand resting on his thigh, and his head turned to his fair companion on the white.

"Oh, the *wretch*!" sneers Miss Amelia; and the fair sisters look at Lucy and then at him with the utmost disgust.

Mr. Sponge may now be doubled up by half a dozen falls ere either of them would suggest the propriety of having him bled.

Lucy's cheeks are rather blanched with the "pale cast of thought," for she is not sufficiently initiated in the mysteries of steeple-chasing to know that it is often quite as good for a man to lose as to win, which it had just been quietly arranged between Sponge and Buckram should be the case on this occasion, Buckram having got uncommonly "well on" to the losing tune. Perhaps, however, Lucy was thinking of the peril, not the profit of the thing.

The young ladies on the stand eye her with mingled feelings of pity and disdain, while the elderly ones shake their heads, call her a bold hussy—declare she's not so pretty—adding that they "wouldn't have come if they'd known," &c. &c.

But it is half-past two (an hour and a half after time), and

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there is at last a disposition evinced by some of the parties to go to the post. Broad-backed party-coloured jockeys are seen converging that way, and the betting-men close in, getting more and more clamorous for odds. What a hubbub! How they bellow! How they roar! A universal deafness seems to have come over the whole of them. "Seven to one 'gain the Bart.!" screams one—"I'll take eight!" roars another. "Five to one agen Herc'les!" cries a third—"Done!" roars a fourth. "Twice over!" rejoins the other—"Done!" replies the taker. "Ar'll take five to one agin the Daddy!"—"I'll lay six!" "What'll any one lay 'gin Parvo?" And so they raise such an uproar that the *squeak, squeak, squeak* of the

"Devil among the tailors,"

is hardly heard.

Then, in a partial lull the voice of Lord Scamperdale rises, exclaiming, "Oh, you hideous Hobgoblin, bull-and-mouth of a boy! you think, because I'm a lord, and can't swear, or use coarse language——" And again the hubbub, led on by the

"Devil among the tailors,"

drowns the exclamations of the speaker. It's that Pacey again; he's accusing the virtuous Mr. Spraggon of handing his extra weight to Lord Scamperdale; and Jack, in the full consciousness of injured guilt, intimates that the blood of the Spraggons won't stand that—that there's "only *one* way of settling it, and he'll be ready for Pacey half an hour after the race."

At length the horses are all out—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen—fifteen of them, moving about in all directions; some taking an up-gallop, others a down: some a spicy trot, others walking to and fro; while one has still his muzzle on, lest he should unship his rider and eat him; and another's groom follows, imploring the mob to keep off his heels if they don't want their heads in their hands. The noisy bell at length summons the scattered forces to the post, and the variegated riders form into as good a line as circumstances will allow. Just as Mr. Sponge turns his horse's head Lucy hands him her

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little silver sherry-flask, which our friend drains to the dregs. As he returns it, with a warm pressure of her soft hand, a pent-up flood of tears burst their bounds, and suffuse her lustrous eyes. She turns away to hide her emotion ; at the same instant a wild shout rends the air—" *W-h-i-r-r ! They're off !* "

Thirteen get away, one turns tail, and our friend in the Lincoln green is left performing a *pas seul*, asking the rearing horse, with an oath, if he thinks "he stole him?" while the mob shout and roar ; and one wicked wag, in coaching parlance, advises him to pay the difference, and get inside.

But what a display of horsemanship is exhibited by the flyers ! Tongs comes off at the first fence, the horse making straight for a pond, while the rest rattle on in a mass. The second fence is small, but there's a ditch on the far side, and Pusher and Gander severally measure their lengths on the rushy pasture beyond. Still there are ten left, and nobody ever reckoned upon these getting to the far end.

"Master wins, for a 'undr'd!" exclaims Leather, as, getting into the third field, Mr. Sponge takes a decided lead ; and Lucy, encouraged by the sound, looks up, and sees her "white jacket" throwing the dry fallow in the faces of the field.

"*Oh, how I hope he will!*" exclaims she, clasping her hands, with upturned eyes ; but when she ventures on another look, she sees old Spraggon drawing upon him, Hangallow's flaming red jacket not far off, and several others nearer than she liked. Still the tail was beginning to form. Another fence, and that a big one, draws it out. A striped jacket is down, and the horse, after a vain effort to rise, sinks lifeless on the ground. On they go all the same !

Loud yells of exciting betting burst from the spectators, and Buckram gets well on for the cross.

There are now five in front—Sponge, Spraggon, Hangallows, Boville, and another ; and already the pace begins to tell. It wasn't possible to run it at the rate they started. Spraggon makes a desperate effort to get the lead ; and Sponge, seeing Boville handy, pulls his horse, and lets the light-weight make play over a rough, heavy fallow with the chestnut. Jack spurs

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and flogs, and grins and foams at the mouth. Thus they get half round the oval course. They are now directly in front of the hill, and the spectators gaze with intense anxiety;—now vociferating the name of this horse, now of that; now shouting “Red jacket!” now “White!” while the blind fiddler perseveres with the old melody of—“The Devil among the Tailors.”

“Now they come to the brook!” exclaims Leather, who has been over the ground; and as he speaks, Lucy distinctly sees Mr. Sponge’s gather and effort to clear it; and—oh, horror!—the horse falls—he’s down—no, he’s up!—and her lover’s in his seat again; and she flatters herself it was her sherry that saved him. *Splash!*—a horse and rider duck under; three get over; two go in; now another clears it, and the rest turn tail.

What splashing and screaming, and whipping and spurring, and how hopeless the chance of any of them to recover their lost ground. The race is now clearly between five. Now for the wall! It’s five feet high, built of heavy blocks, and strong in the staked-out part. As he nears it, Jack sits well back, getting Daddy Longlegs well by the head, and giving him a refresher with the whip. It is Jack’s last move! His horse comes, neck and croup, over, rolling Jack up like a ball of worsted on the far side. At the same moment, Multum-in-Parvo goes at it full tilt; and, not rising an inch, sends Captain Boville flying one way, his saddle another, himself a third, and the stones all ways. Mr. Sponge then slips through, closely followed by Hangallows and a jockey in yellow, with a tail of three after them. They then put on all the steam they can raise over the twenty-acre pasture that follows.

The white!—the red!—the yaller! The red!—the white! —the yaller! and anybody’s race! A sheet would cover them!—crack! whack! crack! how they flog! Hercules springs at the sound.

Many of the excited spectators begin hallooing, and straddling, and working their arms as if their gestures and

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vociferations would assist the race. Lord Scamperdale stands transfixed. He is staring through his silver spectacles at the awkwardly lying ball that represents poor Spraggon.

"*By Heavens!*" exclaims he, in an undertone to himself, "*I believe he's killed!*" And thereupon he swung down the stand-stairs, rushed to his horse, and clapping spurs to his sides, struck across the country to the spot.

Long before he got there the increased uproar of the spectators announced the final struggle; and, looking over his shoulder, he saw white jacket hugging his horse home, closely followed by red, and shooting past the winning-post.

"Dash that Mr. Sponge!" growled his lordship, as the cheers of the winners closed the scene.

"The brute's won, in spite of him!" gasped Buckram, turning dead pale at the sight.

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CHAPTER LXX.

HOW OTHER THINGS CAME OFF.



WERE hard to say whether Lucy's joy at Sponge's safety or Lord Scamperdale's grief at poor Spraggon's death, was most overpowering. Each found relief in a copious flood of tears. Lucy sobbed and laughed, and sobbed and laughed again; and seemed as if her little heart would burst its bounds. The mob, ever open to sentiment — especially the sentiment of beauty — cheered and shouted as she rode with her lover from the winning to the weighing post.

"A', she's a *bonny 'un*!" exclaimed a countryman, looking intently up in her face.

"She is that!" cried another, doing the same.

"Three cheers for the lady!" shouted a tall Shaggyford rough, taking off his woolly cap, and waving it.

"*Hoo-ray! hoo-ray! hoo-ray!*" shouted a group of flannel-clad navvies.

"Three for white jacket!" then roared a blue-coated butcher, who had won as many half-crowns on the race. — Three cheers were given for the unwilling winner.

"Oh, my poor dear Jack!" exclaimed his lordship, throwing himself off his horse, and wringing his hands in despair, as a select party of thimble-riggers, who had gone to Jack's assistance, raised him up, and turned his ghastly face, with his eyes squinting inside out, and the foam still on his mouth, full upon him. "Oh, my poor dear Jack!" repeated his lordship, sinking on his knees beside him, and grasping his stiffening

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hand as he spoke. His lordship sank overpowered upon the body.

The thimble-riggers then availed themselves of the opportunity to ease his lordship and Jack of their watches and the few shillings they had about them, and departed.

When a lord is in distress, consolation is never long in coming; and Lord Scamperdale had hardly got over the first paroxysms of grief, and gathered up Jack's cap and the fragments of his spectacles, ere Jawleyford, who had noticed his abrupt departure from the stand, and scurry across the country, arrived at the spot. His lordship was still in the full agony of woe; still grasping and bedewing Jack's cold hand with tears.

"Oh, my dear Jack! Oh, my dear Jawleyford! Oh, my dear Jack!" sobbed he, as he mopped the fast-chasing tears from his grizzly cheeks with a red cotton kerchief. "Oh, my dear Jack! Oh, my dear Jawleyford! Oh, my dear Jack!" repeated he, as a fresh flood spread o'er the rugged surface. "Oh, what a tr-reasure, what a tr-tr-trump he was. Shall never get such another. Nobody could s-s-s—lang a fi-fi—field as he could; no hu—hu—humbug 'bout him—never was su—su—such a fine natural bl—bl—blackguard;" and then his feelings wholly choked his utterance as he recollected how easily Jack was satisfied; how he could dine off tripe and cow-heel, mop up fat porridge for breakfast, and never grumbled at being put on a bad horse.

The news of a man being killed soon reached the hill, and drew the attention of the mob from our hero and heroine, causing such a spread of population over the farm as must have been highly gratifying to Scourgefield, who stood watching the crashing of the fences and the demolition of the gates, thinking how he was paying his landlord off.

Seeing the rude, unmannerly character of the mob, Jawleyford got his lordship by the arm, and led him away towards the hill, his lordship reeling, rather than walking, and indulging in all sorts of wild, incoherent cries and lamentations.

"Sing out, Jack! sing out!" he would exclaim, as if in the

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agony of having his hounds ridden over ; then, checking himself, he would shake his head and say, " Ah, poor Jack, poor Jack ! shall never look upon his like again—shall never get such a man to read the riot-act, and keep all square." And then a fresh gush of tears suffused his grizzly face.

The minor casualties of those few butchering spasmodic moments may be briefly dismissed, though they were more numerous than most sportsmen see out hunting in a lifetime.

One horse broke his back, another was drowned, Multum-in-Parvo was cut all to pieces, his rider had two ribs and a thumb broken, while Farmer Slyfield's stack-yard was fired by some of the itinerant tribe, and all its uninsured contents destroyed—so that his landlord was not the only person who suffered by the grand occasion.

Nor was this all, for Mr. Numboy, the coroner, hearing of Jack's death, held an inquest on the body ; and, having empannelled a matter-of-fact jury—men who did not see the advantage of steeple-chasing, either in a political, commercial, agricultural, or national point of view, and who, having surveyed the line, and found nearly every fence dangerous, and the wall and brook doubly so, returned a verdict of manslaughter against Mr. Viney for setting it out, who was forthwith committed to the county gaol of Limbo Castle for trial at the ensuing assizes, from whence let us join the benevolent clerk of arraigns in wishing him a good deliverance.

Many of the hardy " tips " sounded the loud trump of victory, proclaiming that their innumerable friends had feathered their nests through their agency ; but Peeping Tom, and Infallible Joe, and Enoch Wriggle, the " offending soul," &c., found it convenient to bolt from their respective establishments, carrying with them their large fire-screens, camp-stools, and boards for posting up their lists, and setting up in new names in other quarters ; while the Hen Angel was shortly afterwards closed, and the presentation-tureen made into " white soup."

So much for the " small deer." We will now devote a concluding chapter to the " great guns " of our story.

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CHAPTER LXXI.

HOW LORD SCAMPERDALE AND CO. CAME OFF.



UR noble master's nerves were so dreadfully shattered by the lamentable catastrophe to poor Jack, that he stepped, or rather was pushed, into Jawleyford's carriage almost insensibly, and driven from the course to Jawleyford Court.

There he remained sufficiently long for Mrs. Jawleyford to persuade him that he would be far better married, and that either of her amiable daughters would make him a most excellent wife. His lordship, after very mature consideration, and many most scrutinising stares at both of them through his formidable spectacles, wondering which would be the least likely to ruin him—at length decided upon taking Miss Emily, the youngest, though for a long time the victory was doubtful, and Amelia practised her “Scamperdale” singing with unabated ardour and confidence up to the last. We believe, if the truth were known, it was a slight touch of rouge, that Amelia thought would clench the matter, that decided his lordship against her. Emily, we are happy to say, makes him an excellent wife, and has not got her head turned by becoming a countess. She has improved his lordship amazingly, got him smart new clothes, and persuaded him to grow bushy whiskers right down under his chin, and is now feeling her way to a pair of moustaches.

Woodmansterne is quite another place. She has marshalled a proper establishment, and got him coaxed into the long put-away company rooms. Though he still indulges in his former cow-heel and other delicacies, they do not appear upon table ;

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while he sports his silver-mounted specs on all occasions. The fruit and venison are freely distributed, and we have come in for a haunch in return for our attentions.

Best of all, Lady Scamperdale has got his lordship to erect a handsome marble monument to poor Jack, instead of the cheap country stone he intended. The inscription states that it was erected by Samuel, Eighth Earl of Scamperdale, and Viscount Hardup, in the Peerage of Ireland, to the Memory of John Spraggon, Esquire, the best of Sportsmen, and the firmest of Friends. Who or what Jack was, nobody ever knew, and as he only left a hat and eighteen pence behind him, no next of kin has as yet cast up.

Jawleyford has not stood the honour of the Scamperdale alliance quite so well as his daughter; and when our "amazin' instance of a pop'lar man," instigated perhaps by the desire to have old Scamp for a brother-in-law, offered to Amelia, Jaw got throaty and consequential, hemmed and hawed, and pretended to be stiff about it. Puff, however, produced such weighty testimonials, as soon exercised their wonted influence. In due time Puff very magnanimously proposed uniting his pack with Lord Scamperdale's, dividing the expense of one establishment between them, to which his lordship readily assented, advising Puff to get rid of Bragg by giving him the hounds, which he did; and that great sporting luminary may be seen "s-c-e-u-s-e"-ing himself, and offering his service to masters of hounds any Monday at Tattersall's—though he still prefers a "quality place."

Benjamin Buckram, the gentleman with the small independence of his own, we are sorry to say has gone to the "bad." Aggravated by the loss he sustained by his horse winning the steeple-chase, he made an ill-advised onslaught on the cash-box of the London and Westminster Bank; and at three score years and ten, this distinguished "turfite," who had participated with impunity in nearly all the great robberies of the last forty years, was doomed to transportation. And yet we have seen this cracksman captain—for he, too, was a captain at times—jostling and bellowing for odds among some of the highest and noblest of the land!

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Leather has descended to the cab-stand, of which he promises to be a distinguished ornament. He haunts the Piccadilly stands, and has what he calls "'stablish'd a raw" on Mr. Sponge to the extent of three-and-sixpence a week, under threats of exposing the robbery Sponge committed on our friend Mr. Waffles. That volatile genius, we are happy to add, is quite well, and open to the attentions of any young lady who thinks she can tame a wild young man. His financial affairs are not irretrievable.

And now for the hero and heroine of our tale. The Sponges—for our friend married Lucy shortly after the steeple-chase—stayed at Nonsuch House until the bailiffs walked in. Sir Harry then bolted to Boulogne, where he shortly afterwards died, and Bugles very properly married my lady. They are now living at Wandsworth; Mr. Bugles and Lady Scattercash, very "much thought of"—as Bugles says.

Although Mr. Sponge did not gain as much by winning the steeple-chase as he would have done had Hercules allowed him to lose it, he still did pretty well; and being at length starved out of Nonsuch House, he arrived at his old quarters, the "Bantam," in Bond Street, where he turned his attention very seriously to providing for Lucy and the little Sponge, who had now issued its prospectus. He thought over all the ways and means of making money without capital, rejecting Australia and California as unfit for sportsmen and men fond of their "Moggs." Professional steeple-chasing Lucy decried, declaring she would rather return to her flag-exercises at Astley's, as soon as she was able, than have her dear Sponge risking his neck that way. Our friend at length began to fear fortune-making was not so easy as he thought—indeed, he was soon sure of it.

One day as he was staring vacantly out of the "Bantam" coffee-room window, between the gilt labels, "Hot Soups," and "Dinners," he was suddenly seized with a fit of virtuous indignation at the disreputable frauds practised by unprincipled adventurers on the unwary public, in the way of betting-offices, and resolved that he would be the St. George to slay this great dragon of abuse. Accordingly, after due consultation with



MR. AND MRS. SPONGE.

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Lucy, he invested his all in fitting up and decorating the splendid establishment in Jermyn Street, St. James's, now known as the SPONGE CIGAR AND BETTING ROOMS, whose richness neither pen nor pencil can do justice to.

We must, therefore, entreat our readers to visit this emporium of honesty, where, in addition to finding lists posted on all the great events of the day, they can have the use of a "Mogg" while they indulge in one of Lucy's unrivalled cigars; and noblemen, gentlemen, and officers in the household troops, may be accommodated with loans on their personal security to any amount. We see by Mr. Sponge's last advertisements that he has £116,300 to lend at three-and-a-half per cent.!

"What a farce," we fancy we hear some enterprising youngster exclaim—"What a farce, to suppose that such a needy scamp as Mr. Sponge, who has been cheating everybody, has any money to lend, or to pay bets with if he loses!" Right, young gentleman, right; but not a bit greater farce than to suppose that any of the plausible money-lenders, or infallible "tips" with whom you, perhaps, have had connection, have any either, in case it's called for. Nay, bad as he is, we'll back old Soapey to be better than any of them—with which encomium we most heartily bid him ADIEU.

THE END.

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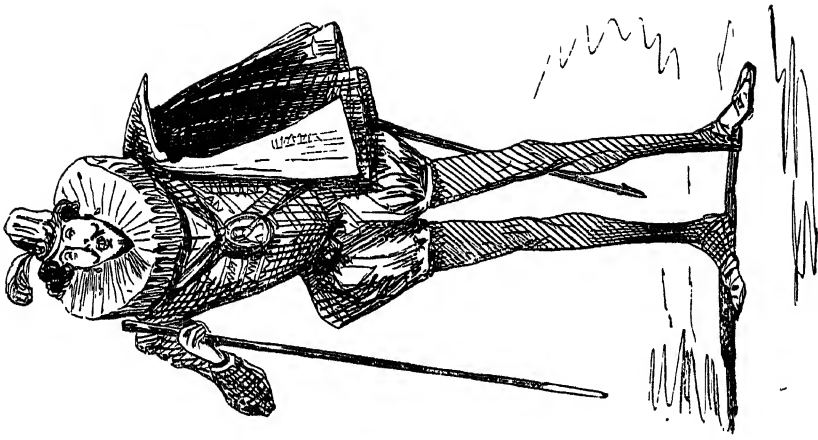


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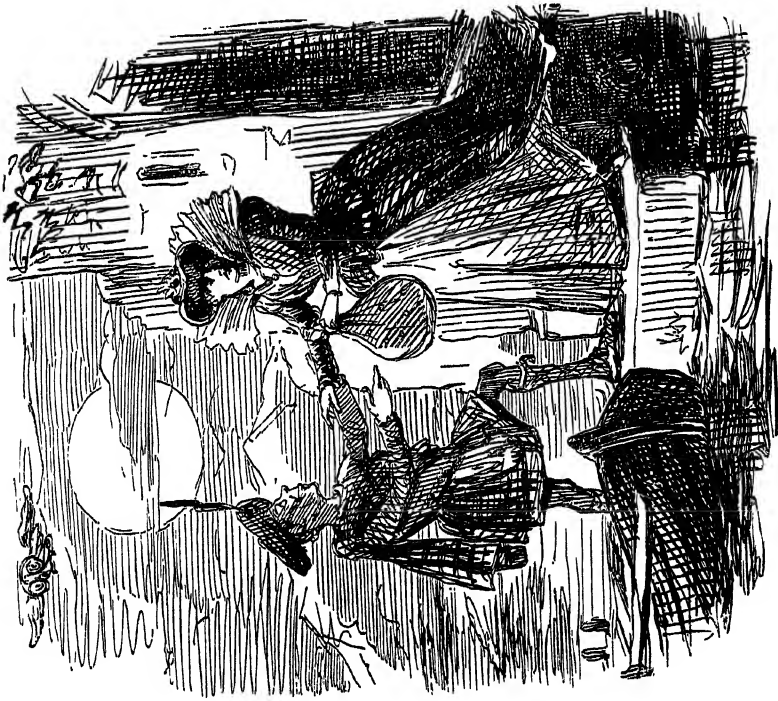
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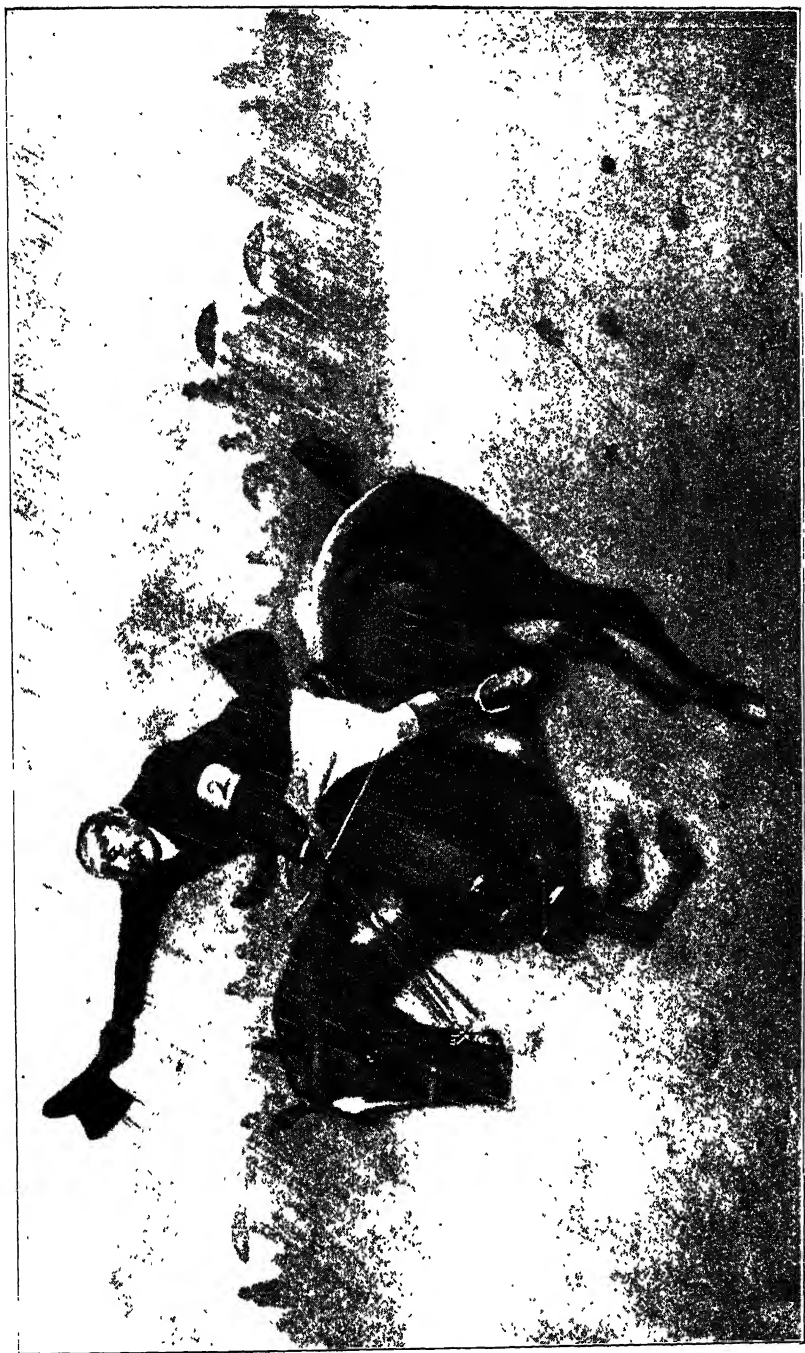
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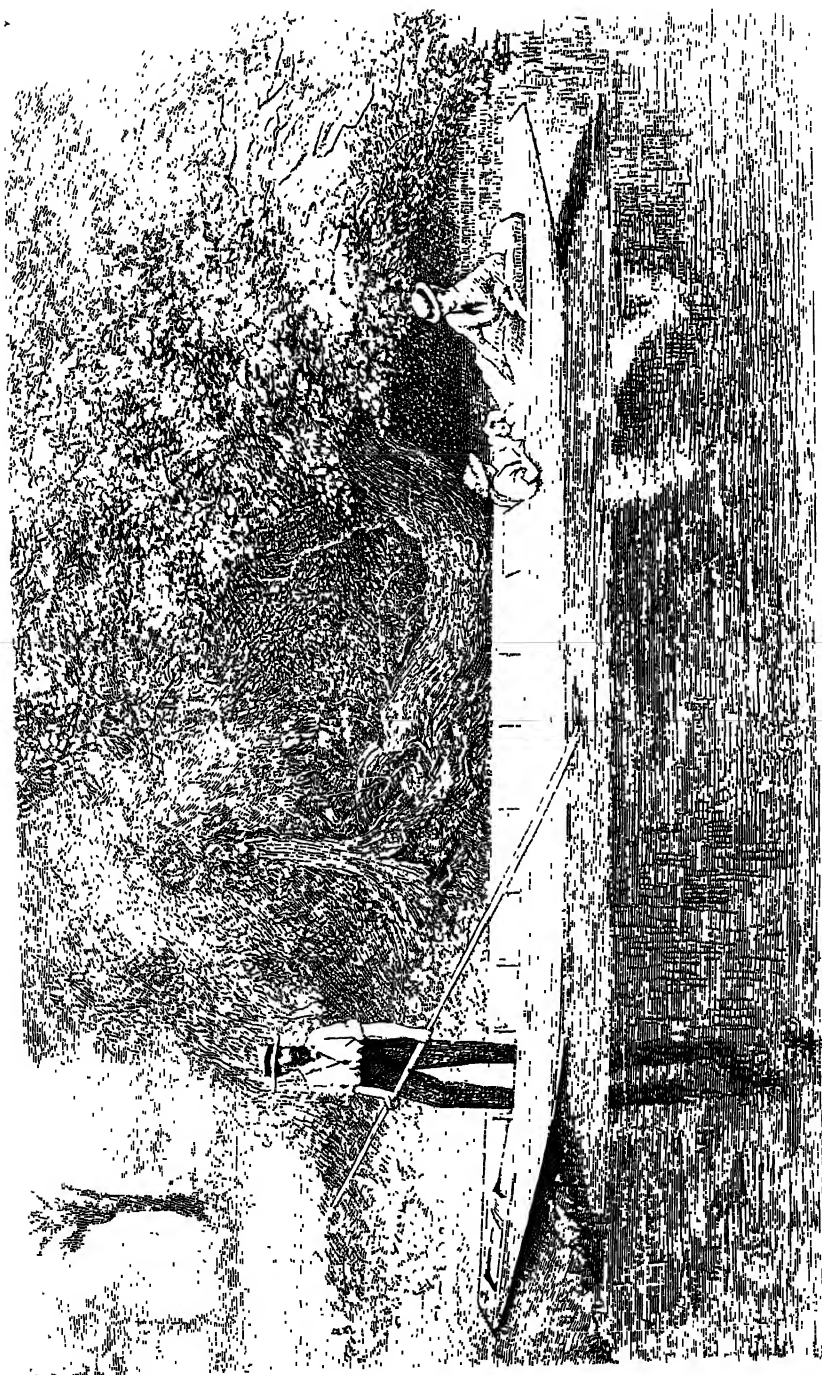
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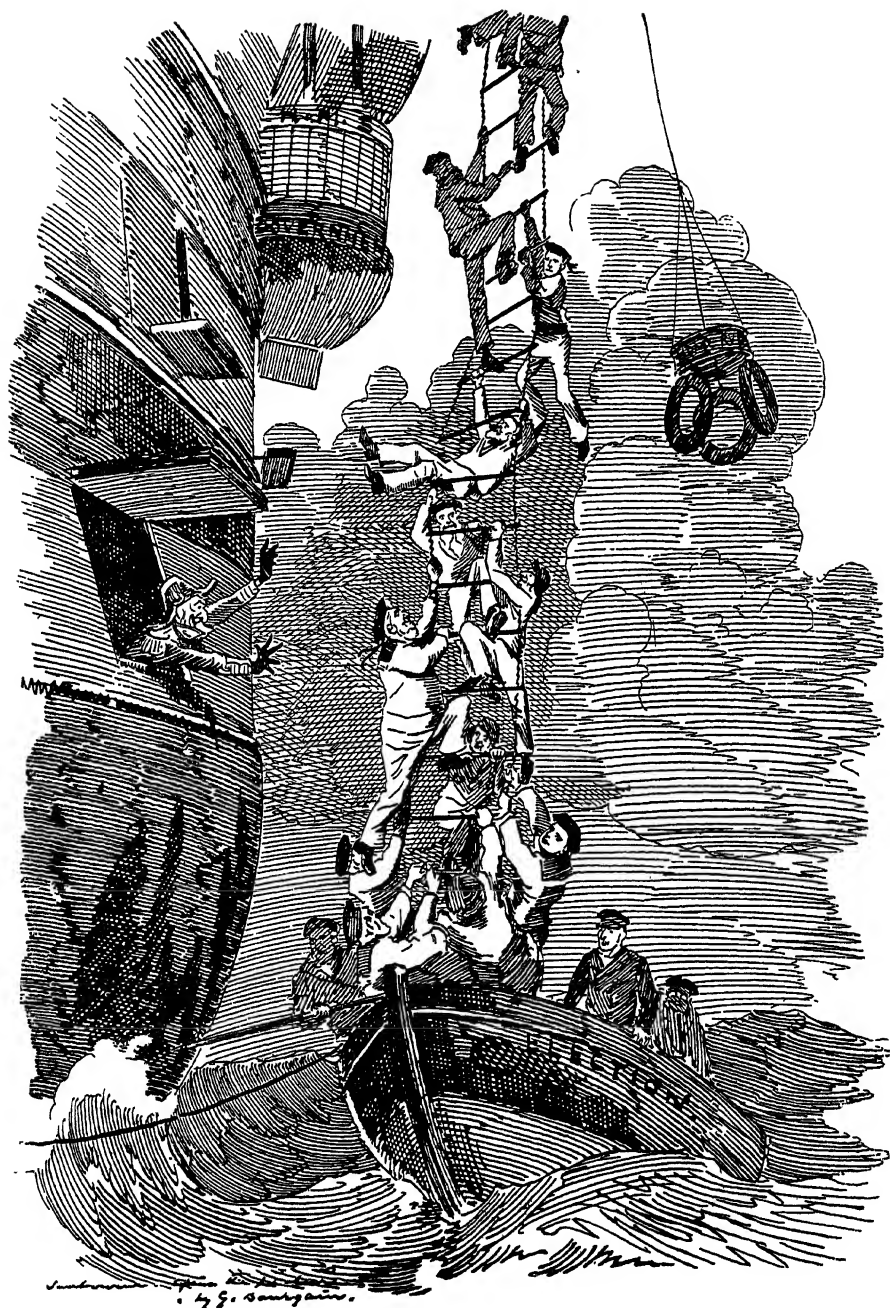
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Then take thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh ;

But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed

One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
Are, by the laws of Venice, confiscate

Unto the state of Venice.

Gra. O upright judge !—Mark, Jew !—O
learned judge !

Shy. Is that the law ?

Por. Thyself shall see the act :
For, as thou urgest justice, be assured
Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest.

Gra. O learned judge !—Mark, Jew ;—a
learned judge !

Shy. I take this offer then,—pay the bond
thrice,

And let the Christian go.

Bass. Here is the money.

Por. Soft.

The Jew shall have all justice ;—soft ;—no
haste ;—

He shall have nothing but the penalty.

Gra. O Jew ! an upright judge, a learned
judge !

Por. Therefore, prepare thee to cut off the
flesh.

Shed thou no blood ; nor cut thou less, nor more,
But just a pound of flesh : if thou tak'st more,

Or less, than a just pound,—be it but so much

As makes it light, or heavy, in the substance,

Or the division of the twentieth part

Of one poor scruple,—nay, if the scale do turn

But in the estimation of a hair,—

Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate.

Gra. A second Daniel, a Daniel, Jew !

Now, infidel, I have thee on the hip,

Por. Why doth the Jew pause ? take thy for-
feiture.

Shy. Give me my principal, and let me go.

Bass. I have it ready for thee ; here it is.

Por. He hath refused it in the open court ;

He shall have merely justice, and his bond.

Gra. A Daniel, still say I ; a second Daniel !—
I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word.

Shy. Shall I not have barely my principal ?

Por. Thou shalt have nothing ; but the for-
feiture,

To be so taken at thy peril, Jew.

Shy. Why, then the devil give him good of it !
I'll stay no longer question.

Por.

The law hath yet another hold on you.

It is enacted in the laws of Venice,—

If it be proved against an alien,

That by direct or indirect attempts

He seek the life of any citizen,

The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive

Shall seize one half his goods ; the other half

Comes to the privy coffer of the state ;

And the offender's life lies in the mercy

Of the duke only, 'gainst all other voice.

In which predicament, I say, thou stand'st ;

For it appears by manifest proceeding,

That, indirectly, and directly too,

Thou hast contrived against the very life

Of the defendant ; and thou hast incurr'd

The danger formerly by me rehearsed.

Down, therefore, and beg mercy of the duke.

Gra. Beg that thou mayst have leave to hang
thyself :

And yet, thy wealth being forfeit to the state,

Thou hast not left the value of a cord ;

6

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GLOSSARY.

Excrement—bedded hair, like life in excrements.

The word *excrement* was a general term for anything growing out of the body, as the hair or nails.

Byasses, nestlings. An *eyas* is a young unfledged hawk, just taken from the nest.

Fantasy, imagination, fancy.

Fardels, cumbersome or inconvenient burdens,

Fay, faith. Possibly from the French *foi*.

For and *a shrouding sheet*, and also a shrouding sheet.

Rondelet, undoes, destroys, ruins.

Friendship, friendliness, friendship, favour.

Fust, to become mouldy or fusty, to smell ill.

Gentry, courtesy, good breeding, politeness.

Gib, a tom-cat.

Gules, red. A term in heraldry.

Handsaw—know a *haruk* from a *handsaw*. The word "handsaw" is a corruption of *heronshaw*, a provincial term for a heron.

Helenon, possibly intended for *henbane*.

Hent—know thou a more horrid hent, i.e. be reserved for a more dreadful occasion.

Hic et ubique, here and everywhere.

Hoodman-blind, the game of blind-man's buff.

Hugger-mugger, clandestinely, by stealth.

Impudens, unchecked, without pity, merciless.

Imponed, laid down as a wager.

In few, in a few words, in brief.

John-a-dreams, a sleepy, muddle-headed fellow.

Jump, just, exactly, in the nick of time. A familiar term with this signification in Shakespeare's days.

Keep—where they keep, i.e. what places they frequent.

K'the, a chillblain.

Lets, hinders, prevents, impedes.

Liberal shepherds, free-spoken, licentious shepherds. An obsolete meaning of the word *liberal*.

GLOSSARY.

Lined soul, i.e. caught as with bird-lime.

List, a boundary or limit.

Loggats, an old game, which consisted in fixing a stake in the ground and pitching small pieces of wood at it.

Long live the King! The watchword of the night.

Maxard, the head, the skull.

Merely—posers it merely, i.e. absolutely.

Misching mallecho, Skulking mischief.

Mitch, moist, shedding tears.

Mobbed, muffled or wrapped up, veiled.

Most star, the moon.

Mutines, mutineers.

Napkin—take my napkin, i.e. my handkerchief.

Native to, connected by nature with.

Obscious, serious, as at funeral obsequies.

Occurrents, occurrences, current incidents or events.

Paddock, a toad. A diminutive of the Anglo-Saxon *pad*, a toad.

Painted word, i.e. disguised word.

Patocke, a peacock.

Parle, a parley, a conference with an opponent.

Perdy, an exclamation. A contraction from the French *par Dieu!*

Polacks, Poles, natives of Poland.

Porpentine, porcupine. An obsolete form of the word.

Provincial roses on my raised shoes, i.e. rosettes in the shape of Provence or damask roses, on shoes, which according to the fashion of the period were slashed or streaked in patterns.

Quiddits, quiddities, subtleties in law or in common talk.

Quillies, nice points or quibbles.

Quoted, observed, noted, scanned.

Rack, a mass of clouds.

Recorders. A recorder was a kind of flag-colet.

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